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# MY STUDY WINDOWS.

# MY
# STUDY WINDOWS

BY

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

WITH INTRODUCTION

BY RICHARD GARNETT, LL.D.

LONDON:
WALTER SCOTT, 24 WARWICK LANE.
PATERNOSTER ROW.

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# Introduction.

HILE, as a rule, it is impossible to speak with too high appreciation of the busy, restless, inquisitive intellect of ancient Greece, there is one point in which it signally disappoints reasonable expectation. It was incurious respecting the literature of foreign nations. The monuments of Egypt excited the wonder of Herodotus; the social condition of this nation and of Babylonia aroused his intelligent interest; we are infinitely indebted to him for the facts which he has observed and recorded: and if his survey of the history of these countries is inaccurate and uncritical, it at least proves that he deemed the subject worthy of his attention. But we should hardly have learned from him that Egypt and Babylonia possessed a literature. If Plato really sought the East in quest of mystic knowledge, his intercourse with the Oriental mind was merely oral. Megasthenes spent years in the industrious investigation of the natural conditions and products of India, but he never gave a thought to Sanscrit, about which the modern Italian traveller, Della Valle, inquires intelligently as soon as he sets foot in the country. Some excuse may be made for this want of interest in strange speech and unfamiliar thought; but what can be said of the phenomenon of Greeks dwelling for centuries under the dominion of a kindred people, whose language is nearly akin to theirs, whose literature is modelled upon and partly derived from their own, in whose temples they may worship, whose laws they must obey, whose families they instruct, with whose public and private life they are in daily contact, while yet their literature is almost destitute of allusion to any evidence of intellectual life among their rulers, pupils, and intimates?

Had Greek literature perished, its renown would have left abundant traces in the literature of Rome. If Latin literature had disappeared, we should hardly have been aware of the loss. How infinitely would our knowledge be extended if Greece had played the part of an active and busy critic, if we had known what a Greek Quintilian thought of a Latin Homer or Thucydides, and been able to read a Cæsar with the eyes of an Arrian!

This strange insensibility is at this day a thing of the past. Every civilised nation now takes a warm interest in the literature of its sister peoples, and each is more or less able to see itself in its literary aspect as it is seen by others. The rapid conquest which Russian and Norwegian novels have recently made of the circulating libraries of all nations is one of the phenomena of the age, and an Italian critic has just awarded the palm of contemporary love poetry to a Portuguese. Differences of national taste and habit form, of course, serious obstacles to adequate recognition. We English necessarily suffer from our insularity, the cheap price of our independence. Some of our great writers have indeed beaten down all opposition, and made good their place in universal literature. But we have still to deplore that the Continent which has accepted Shakespeare, Scott, and Byron, and is slowly familiarising itself with Wordsworth and Shelley, which has adopted Dickens and Thackerary and tries to digest George Eliot, remains as a whole deaf and blind to Keats, Browning, and Landor; to Borrow and De Quincey and Patmore; accords no welcome to the young genius of a Shorthouse or a Jefferies, and adds the last sensational tales of the day to its cheap reprints with as much satisfaction as it includes a Brontë or a Meredith. This scarcely seems the case with any other country. Elsewhere the success of the national author among foreigners appears fairly proportioned to the recognition he has obtained at home. We alone complain that the fame of much of our best authorship is local, or at least should have to make that complaint, but for a circumstance which turns the balance in our favour.

This circumstance is, that the wide dissemination of our race over the western and the northern continents is raising up new centres of culture which derive their tone from England, which provide her men of letters with a public destined to become more ample than Europe could afford, were Europe English, and which promises to afford them, at no distant date, all the advantages of exterior criticism, unwarped by having had to pass through a foreign medium. When Australia shall have become more thoroughly differentiated from the mother country than is now the case, the capability of impressing an Australian audience will be no bad test of the merit of an English author. At present she is too much a reproduction of England, and has too little indigenous literature of worth to inspire confidence in her critical deliverances. American culture seems almost venerable in comparison, and has had time to develop literary types which entitle it to an independent rank among intellectual civilisations. Though far more intimately connected with the culture of the parent country than the Roman was with the Greek, being much more of an offshoot than of a copy, it renders English letters the same service as Rome rendered to the Greeks, in subjecting them to the criticism of an intelligent and impartial opinion, and greatly extending their circulation and usefulness. Thanks to America, the preservation of English literature, so far as already existing, is assured, and the prospect of its continued existence is indefinitely strengthened. What the mother country has already produced of excellent is safe, and the stimulus to future production is rendered infinitely more active. The English author now speaks to an audience of a hundred millions, soon to be doubled and trebled, even apart from the reasonable anticipation that it may ere very long include the cultivated classes of India and Japan, if not even of China. In presence of such a majestic fact, European criticism, however welcome and valuable, is not essential. The imprimatur of Paris or Berlin is not wanted; and the time is arriving when the Continental writer who would rise to cosmopolitan fame must captivate the Anglo-American public. From this point of view

it would almost seem that while superior excellence of production may long remain the attribute of England, the decisive voice in criticism may pass to America. In proportion as literature becomes, as it is becoming, cosmopolitan, as the great author is received as the common heritage of all nations, the more liberal and universal taste must supplant the narrower and more exclusively national. While indigenous American literature, the only native article which has no help from a protective tariff, struggles as hopelessly with the foreigner as British corn contends with American, and for the same reason ; the affluence of importation, mischievous in many respects, fosters that width of view and freedom from conventional prejudice which distinguishes American judgment in literary as in other matters. Americans far surpass us English in the prompt recognition of excellence. Carlyle, De Quincey, Coventry Patmore, James Martineau, found their first considerable audiences across the Atlantic. Americans are quicker to discover the merits of a foreign author, more thorough in naturalising him, and demand a higher standard of excellence in the translation of his works. Hence they are better fitted than we to assign a writer his proper place without unreasonable delay, and to recommend him to the world. All the novels of Marie Schwarz have been translated in America ; in England scarcely one. Turgeneff, Björson, Jonas Lie, are almost as much household words as Hawthorne or Henry James. At the same time, writers of that peculiarly intense nationalism which circumscribes itself within the limits of a district, such as Cable and Egbert Craddock, are no less popular. This flexibility and catholicity of taste will invest American criticism with especial authority, as it becomes more generally recognised. It admirably fits America to do for England what Greece might have done for Rome—to win an entrance for her literature into nations hitherto repelled by her insularity, or, failing that, to make her independent of them.

Two natural and inevitable developments may be remarked in American criticism. There is first the classical, conservative, cautious school of the Irvings and Channings and Ticknors,

and of the old *North American Review* in general; a school consciously under the influence of the old country. There is also a younger school consciously aiming at originality, at evolving a national type, and occupying a position in criticism akin to Bret Harte's in production. This is undoubtedly the school of the future, destined to prevail more and more as America becomes more and more differentiated from Europe. It embodies all the specifically American characteristics, which are, however, precisely such as require to be kept in check by the refinement and moderation of the older school, and it will be ill for it if, in effacing its predecessor, it fails to absorb the latter's qualities.

Mr. Russell Lowell is, in a sense, the most perfect representative of American criticism to be found, for he occupies a central position between the old school and the new. An exemplar of the highest New England culture, his poetry either emulated English models, or attained a classic finish, admirable as such, but excluding any marked individuality of style. Suddenly, as it were at a bound, he became the leader of a new departure, and placed himself in the first rank of native humorists. There had seemed neither the "promise" nor the "potency" of the *Fable for Critics* or the *Biglow Papers* in *Sir Launfal;* but circumstances had given him something to say which the ordinary style was incapable of expressing: with true insight he discerned the fact, and with happy flexibility created a new literary form to meet the demand. The *Fable for Critics*, indeed, is rather the revelation of an unsuspected talent than of a novel style. But the *Biglow Papers* is a *That in Wörten.* It not merely struck a new vein of humour which has ever since gushed like a Virginian oil-spring: but it was a revelation to European readers of the sound healthy instincts of the American people, when not perverted by speculation or misguided by professional politicians. It showed there was a love of righteousness to which the high-minded statesman might confidently appeal, and it foreshadowed the sacrifices and triumphs of the great civil war. It was the more effective as being itself the product of a deep moral indignation, stung

into energy by Texan annexations, Mexican wars, Fugitive Slave Bills, and the other too abundant evidences of subserviency to the slave power and general political demoralisation, so rife at that unhappy period. At the same time, there was nothing in Mr. Lowell in the slightest degree tasteless, absurd, or fanatical. He impressed the conviction that he was not only much better than the professional politicians of his day, but also much wiser. The same sanity characterises his deliverances as a critic. He is original to a much higher degree than the Irvings and the Ticknors, and his originality is of a distinctively national type. But he has not that disengagement from all traditional and conventional influences—sometimes real, sometimes affected—which characterises or is assumed by younger men. He is free from their extravagance, but he does not succeed so often in setting old things in a new light. Hence the English reader will find him less suggestive and stimulating than a Greek might have found a Roman, if he had condescended to study the latter. He is like an English fruit transplanted, racy, it may be said, of the new soil, but not endowed with the full flavour of an indigenous product.

As his own *Fable for Critics* foreshadowed what might come of satire applied to politics: so his criticisms hint what service American culture may render to English letters when it has obtained an entirely independent point of view. That it has not yet done so is recognised by Mr. Lowell himself in his essay on Josiah Quincy, in language perhaps even stronger than altogether justified by the circumstances. It may almost be suggested that he writes as a New Englander, and that a citizen of the Great West, while allowing with him that America "must submit herself to the European standard of intellectual weights and measures," would claim that she had earned the right to apply them in her own way to the estimate of other nations' products and her own. Such intellectual standards are in a measure elastic. There is but one manner of weighing tea all the world over, but the literary balance, though graduated on the same principles, must inevitably yield various results.

The essay from which this quotation is taken belongs to the

group of Mr. Lowell's essays dealing with American persons and things, and is one of the most characteristic. Thomas Quincy, "the great public character," belongs to a type in one sense almost extinct in the United States, in another, it is to be hoped, multiplying. The vast development of population, industry, and foreign immigration, leaves no room for the quasi-aristocracy represented by Mr. Quincy. The old patricianship of Massachusetts and Virginia, worthy in many respects of the best days of the Roman Republic, cannot exist in so numerous and so thoroughly democratised a community, any more than the Roman Senate could retain its influence when the franchise had been extended to all the citizens of the empire. But democracy has not proved incapable of producing honest men and bearing them to office, and the new type of homely, practical citizen, like the present Chief Magistrate, if less imposing than that expressed by the stately Quincy, appears to reproduce its virtues. In an essay of kindred subject and spirit, Mr. Lowell sketches, with singular felicity, the character of a great man who in a measure united the type of Quincy and the type of Cleveland. Any less aristocratic personality than Abraham Lincoln's could not, indeed, well be conceived; but the dignity of his nature, once recognised, produced much the same effect as dignity of birth or bearing, while his homely good sense won him the confidence which might have failed to accompany mere respect. The whole character is peculiarly and intensely American, and Mr. Lowell's faithful and sympathetic analysis, rising to eloquence at the close, is a most valuable contribution to the understanding of American affairs, and a most dignified rebuke to the narrow-minded stupidity of average foreign critics. It is more profitable reading every way than the remonstrance, "On a certain condescension in Foreigners," worthy as this is of attention on the part of all travellers who would refrain from wantonly or inadvertently wounding a hospitable people. But it shows temper to a degree unusual with Mr. Lowell, and it does not do justice to the foreigner's case. Belonging to the most cultivated circles of New England, Mr. Lowell has perhaps hardly realised

how much the traveller may have to put up with elsewhere. The picture of Washington society in "Democracy," the work of an American author, is even more unpleasing, if less agonising, than that delineated by the hapless M. de Bacourt forty years ago ; and the most unreasonable carping of the most exacting and self-sufficient European tourist can hardly be more lamentably peevish than the pages devoted to England by no less an American than Hawthorne. Political prejudice on both sides has also a good deal to do with the occasional acerbity of criticism, which is, however, much ameliorated since Mr. Lowell wrote.

Passing by the pretty "Garden Acquaintance" and "Good Word for Winter," we come to another class of Mr. Lowell's American essays—those devoted to American men of letters. Of these there are three in this volume—those treating of Percival, Thoreau, and Emerson as a lecturer. Mr. Lowell is always at his best when most genial, and the subjects of the first two of these do not allow his geniality scope. He cannot put up with the incompetence of Percival, and the poverty of the literary productiveness that was pleaded as its excuse. Genius itself does not get absolution for its *dulcia vitia* as easily as it used ; still, when genius is undeniably present, forgiveness is seldom very remote. But the luckless Percival wanted to exemplify all the errors of genius, and to be petted and admired on the strength of them, without complying with the indispensable condition of *being* a genius. This positively cannot be allowed. Mr. Lowell's estimate of Percival as a poet through all his life, and as a man for the first half of it, is undeniably sound ; but he fails to render justice to him in his peculiar and almost unique character of a pseudo-genius reformed. Mock Byrons usually come to such bad ends, that when we find one of them, in his maturer years, hammer in hand, actually rendering first-rate service to his country as a geologist, one is inclined to exclaim, *Melius sic poenituisse quam non errasse!* Thoreau is altogether a different sort of person, open, it may be, to the contrary charge of having made a trade of self-reliance, as Percival did of helplessness. The essayist half reveals a suspicion

that the apostle of nature may have been something of a charlatan. "This egotism of his is a Stylites pillar after all, a seclusion which keeps him in the public eye. He squatted on another man's land; he borrows an axe; his boards, his nails, his bricks, his mortar, his books, his lamp, his fish-hooks, his plough, his hoe—all turn state's evidence against him as an accomplice in the sin of that artificial civilisation which alone rendered it possible that such a person as Henry D. Thoreau should exist at all." Yet, having so fairly hit this blot, Mr. Lowell reconciles himself to his author, and dismisses him with a benediction. "Emerson the Lecturer" helps one, in some degree, to understand the magnetism exercised by Emerson on men who, as is evidently the case with Mr. Lowell himself, had but slight intellectual affinity with him. Without being precisely told so, we are made to understand that, for a large class of highly-cultivated minds, Emerson was rather a great personality than a great teacher; while it is not denied that to many, differently constituted, he was the bearer of a gospel.

Carlyle naturally succeeds Emerson, and forms a connecting link between the young genius of America and the classic poetry of England which forms the theme of most of Mr. Lowell's remaining essays. The circumstances under which this particular disquisition was penned were unpropitious both for author and subject. Carlyle had certainly been most unfortunate in his treatment of the American Civil War. Everything had conspired to put him wrong. He was prejudiced against philanthropy, he was prejudiced against popular institutions, he was merciless to shiftlessness and incapacity. Philanthropy and liberalism were undoubtedly for the North, and, misled by the English newspapers and the unreasonable complaints of the Federalists themselves, Carlyle early adopted the welcome theory that the South had a monopoly of wisdom and valour. For a champion of the North, for a man absorbed heart and soul in the great struggle, Mr. Lowell's reply is wonderfully moderate. From the point of view of a purely objective criticism, it is much too severe. To retort effectively upon Carlyle

involves the necessity of much carping and cavilling, fair enough in literary warfare, but hardly worthy of a first-class literary judge. We must hope that this will not be Mr. Lowell's last word on Carlyle, whose errors in the point under discussion Time has made so patent that they no longer need Mr. Lowell's pillory, but of whose deserts he might find much more to say.

There remain Mr. Lowell's essays on the classical poets of England, of whom Chaucer, Dryden, and Pope find place in this volume. They all illustrate the favourable position occupied by competent American critics, sufficiently remote from English traditional opinion for complete independence, and yet not estranged from their subjects by differences of language or of manners. The bard of the fourteenth century is manifestly as near to the modern American as to the modern Englishman. One great qualification of Mr. Lowell's for the treatment of Chaucer, which an equally intelligent judge might easily have missed, is his extensive knowledge of the Italian and French literature of Chaucer's age. Dante is equally familiar to him, and is the subject of another essay not included in this collection. The critique on Dryden is perhaps the writer's masterpiece, thoroughly sound and appreciative, and teeming with terse and luminous observations. Pope, less of a favourite with the writer than Dryden, deserved a fuller treatment than he has received. The space given to the "Rape of the Lock" is somewhat disproportionate, though not excessive if the general scale had been more ample. It is startling to be told that Pope's fame as a poet is principally founded upon the "Essay on Man," though the poem undoubtedly ranks among his chief works, and Mr. Lowell's strictures upon it strike us as rather hypercritical. But Pope's literary character as a whole could not be better summed up than in the concluding sentence: "Measured by any high standard of imagination, he will be found wanting; tried by any test of wit, he is unrivalled."

# MY STUDY WINDOWS.

## *MY GARDEN ACQUAINTANCE.*

ONE of the most delightful books in my father's library was White's *Natural History of Selborne*. For me it has rather gained in charm with years. I used to read it without knowing the secret of the pleasure I found in it, but as I grow older I begin to detect some of the simple expedients of this natural magic. Open the book where you will, it takes you out of doors. In our broiling July weather one can walk out with this genially garrulous Fellow of Oriel, and find refreshment instead of fatigue. You have no trouble in keeping abreast of him as he ambles along on his hobby-horse, now pointing to a pretty view, now stopping to watch the motions of a bird or an insect, or to bag a specimen for the Honourable Daines Barrington or Mr. Pennant. In simplicity of taste and natural refinement he reminds one of Walton; in tenderness toward what he would have called the brute creation, of Cowper. I do not know whether his descriptions of scenery are good or not, but they have made me familiar with his neighbourhood. Since I first read him, I have walked over some of his favourite haunts, but I still see them through his eyes rather than by any recollection of actual and personal vision. The book has also the delight-

fulness of absolute leisure. Mr. White seems never to have had any harder work to do than to study the habits of his feathered fellow-townsfolk, or to watch the ripening of his peaches on the wall. His volumes are the journal of Adam in Paradise,

> "Annihilating all that's made
> To a green thought in a green shade."

It is positive rest only to look into that garden of his. It is vastly better than to—

> "See great Diocletian walk
> In the Salonian garden's noble shade,"

for thither ambassadors intrude to bring with them the noises of Rome, while here the world has no entrance. No rumour of the revolt of the American Colonies seems to have reached him. "The natural term of an hog's life" has more interest for him than that of an empire. Burgoyne may surrender and welcome; of what consequence is *that* compared with the fact that we can explain the odd tumbling of rooks in the air by their turning over "to scratch themselves with one claw?" All the couriers in Europe spurring rowel-deep make no stir in Mr. White's little Chartreuse; but the arrival of the house-martin a day earlier or later than last year is a piece of news worth sending express to all his correspondents.

Another secret charm of this book is its inadvertent humour, so much the more delicious because unsuspected by the author. How pleasant is his innocent vanity in adding to the list of the British, and still more of the Selbornian, *fauna!* I believe he would gladly have consented to be eaten by a tiger or a crocodile, if by that means the occasional presence within the parish limits of either of these anthropophagous brutes could have been established. He brags of no fine society, but is plainly a little elated by "having considerable acquaintance with a tame brown owl." Most of us have known our share of owls, but few can boast

of intimacy with a feathered one. The great events of Mr. White's life, too, have that disproportionate importance which is always humorous. To think of his hands having actually been thought worthy (as neither Willoughby's nor Ray's were) to hold a stilted plover, the *Charadrius himantopus*, with no back toe, and therefore "liable, in speculation, to perpetual vacillations!" I wonder, by the way, if metaphysicians have no hind toes. In 1770 he makes the acquaintance in Sussex of "an old family tortoise," which had then been domesticated for thirty years. It is clear that he fell in love with it at first sight. We have no means of tracing the growth of his passion, but in 1780 we find him eloping with its object in a post-chaise. "The rattle and hurry of the journey so perfectly roused it that, when I turned it out in a border, it walked twice down to the bottom of my garden." It reads like a Court Journal:—"Yesterday morning H.R.H. the Princess Alice took an airing of half-an-hour on the terrace of Windsor Castle." This tortoise might have been a member of the Royal Society, if he could have condescended to so ignoble an ambition. It had but just been discovered that a surface inclined at a certain angle with the plane of the horizon took more of the sun's rays. The tortoise had always known this (though he unostentatiously made no parade of it), and used accordingly to tilt himself up against the garden-wall in the autumn. He seems to have been more of a philosopher than even Mr. White himself, caring for nothing but to get under a cabbage-leaf when it rained, or the sun was too hot, and to bury himself alive before frost—a four-footed Diogenes, who carried his tub on his back.

There are moods in which this kind of history is infinitely refreshing. These creatures whom we affect to look down upon as the drudges of instinct are members of a commonwealth whose constitution rests on immovable bases. Never any need of reconstruction there! *They* never dream of settling it by vote that eight hours are equal to ten, or that one creature is as clever as another and no more. *They* do not use their poor wits in regulating God's clocks, nor think

they cannot go astray so long as they carry their guide-board about with them—a delusion we often practise upon ourselves with our high and mighty reason, that admirable finger-post which points every way and always right. It is good for us now and then to converse with a world like Mr. White's, where Man is the least important of animals. But one who, like me, has always lived in the country and always on the same spot, is drawn to his book by other occult sympathies. Do we not share his indignation at that stupid Martin who had graduated his thermometer no lower than 4° above zero of Fahrenheit, so that in the coldest weather ever known the mercury basely absconded into the bulb, and left us to see the victory slip through our fingers just as they were closing upon it? No man, I suspect, ever lived long in the country without being bitten by these meteorological ambitions. He likes to be hotter and colder, to have been more deeply snowed up, to have more trees and larger blown down than his neighbours. With us descendants of the Puritans especially, these weather-competitions supply the abnegated excitement of the race-course. Men learn to value thermometers of the true imaginative temperament, capable of prodigious elations and corresponding dejections. The other day (July 5) I marked 98° in the shade, my high-water mark, higher by one degree than I have ever seen it before. I happened to meet a neighbour; as we mopped our brows at each other, he told me that he had just cleared 100°, and I went home a beaten man. I had not felt the heat before, save as a beautiful exaggeration of sunshine; but now it oppressed me with the prosaic vulgarity of an oven. What had been poetic intensity became all at once rhetorical hyperbole. I might suspect his thermometer (as indeed I did, for we Harvard men are apt to think ill of any graduation but our own); but it was a poor consolation. The fact remained that his herald Mercury, standing a-tiptoe, could look down on mine. I seem to glimpse something of this familiar weakness in Mr. White. He, too, has shared in these mercurial triumphs and defeats. Nor do I doubt that he

had a true country-gentleman's interest in the weathercock; that his first question on coming down of a morning was, like Barabas's—

"Into what quarter peers my halcyon's bill?"

It is an innocent and healthful employment of the mind, distracting one from too continual study of himself, and leading him to dwell rather upon the indigestions of the elements than his own. "Did the wind back round, or go about with the sun?" is a rational question that bears not remotely on the making of hay and the prosperity of crops. I have little doubt that the regulated observation of the vane in many different places, and the interchange of results by telegraph, would put the weather, as it were, in our power, by betraying its ambushes before it is ready to give the assault. At first sight, nothing seems more drolly trivial than the lives of those whose single achievement is to record the wind and the temperature three times a day. Yet such men are doubtless sent into the world for this special end, and perhaps there is no kind of accurate observation, whatever its object, that has not its final use and value for some one or other. It is even to be hoped that the speculations of our newspaper editors and their myriad correspondents upon the signs of the political atmosphere may also fill their appointed place in a well-regulated universe, if it be only that of supplying so many more jack-o'-lanterns to the future historian. Nay, the observations on finance of an M. C. whose sole knowledge of the subject has been derived from a lifelong success in getting a living out of the public without paying any equivalent therefor, will perhaps be of interest hereafter to some explorer of our *cloaca maxima*, whenever it is cleansed.

For many years I have been in the habit of noting down some of the leading events of my embowered solitude, such as the coming of certain birds and the like,—a kind of *mémoires pour servir*, after the fashion of White, rather than properly digested natural history. I thought it not impossible that a few simple stories of my winged acquaint-

ances might be found entertaining by persons of kindred taste.

There is a common notion that animals are better meteorologists than men, and I have little doubt that in immediate weather-wisdom they have the advantage of our sophisticated senses (though I suspect a sailor or shepherd would be their match), but I have seen nothing that leads me to believe their minds capable of erecting the horoscope of a whole season, and letting us know beforehand whether the winter will be severe or the summer rainless. I more than suspect that the clerk of the weather himself does not always know very long in advance whether he is to draw an order for hot or cold, dry or moist, and the musquash is scarce likely to be wiser. I have noted but two days' difference in the coming of the song-sparrow between a very early and a very backward spring. This very year I saw the linnets at work thatching, just before a snow-storm which covered the ground several inches deep for a number of days. They struck work and left us for a while, no doubt in search of food. Birds frequently perish from sudden changes in our whimsical spring weather of which they had no foreboding. More than thirty years ago, a cherry-tree, then in full bloom, near my window, was covered with humming-birds benumbed by a fall of mingled rain and snow, which probably killed many of them. It should seem that their coming was dated by the height of the sun, which betrays them into unthrifty matrimony;

> "So nature pricketh them in their corages;"

but their going is another matter. The chimney-swallows leave us early, for example, apparently so soon as their latest fledglings are firm enough of wing to attempt the long rowing-match that is before them. On the other hand, the wild-geese probably do not leave the North till they are frozen out, for I have heard their bugles sounding southward so late as the middle of December. What may be called local migrations are doubtless dictated by the

chances of food. I have once been visited by large flights of cross-bills; and whenever the snow lies long and deep on the ground, a flock of cedar-birds comes in midwinter to eat the berries on my hawthorns. I have never been quite able to fathom the local, or rather geographical partialities of birds. Never before this summer (1870) have the king-birds, handsomest of flycatchers, built in my orchard; though I always know where to find them within half a mile. The rose-breasted grosbeak has been a familiar bird in Brookline (three miles away), yet I never saw one here till last July, when I found a female busy among my raspberries, and surprisingly bold. I hope she was *prospecting* with a view to settlement in our garden. She seemed, on the whole, to think well of my fruit, and I would gladly plant another bed if it would help to win over so delightful a neighbour.

The return of the robin is commonly announced by the newspapers, like that of eminent or notorious people to a watering-place, as the first authentic notification of spring. And such his appearance in the orchard and garden undoubtedly is. But, in spite of his name of migratory thrush, he stays with us all winter, and I have seen him when the thermometer marked 15 degrees below zero of Fahrenheit, armed impregnably within, like Emerson's Titmouse, and as cheerful as he. The robin has a bad reputation among people who do not value themselves less for being fond of cherries. There is, I admit, a spice of vulgarity in him, and his song is rather of the Bloomfield sort, too largely ballasted with prose. His ethics are of the Poor Richard school, and the main chance which calls forth all his energy is altogether of the belly. He never has those fine intervals of lunacy into which his cousins, the catbird and the mavis, are apt to fall. But for a' that, and twice as muckle's a' that, I would not exchange him for all the cherries that ever came out of Asia Minor. With whatever faults, he has not wholly forfeited that superiority which belongs to the children of nature. He has a finer taste in fruit than could be distilled from

many successive committees of the Horticultural Society, and he eats with a relishing gulp not inferior to Dr. Johnson's. He feels and freely exercises his right of eminent domain. His is the earliest mess of green peas; his all the mulberries I had fancied mine. But if he gets also the lion's share of the raspberries, he is a great planter, and sows those wild ones in the woods that solace the pedestrian and give a momentary calm even to the jaded victims of the White Hills. He keeps a strict eye over one's fruit, and knows to a shade of purple when your grapes have cooked long enough in the sun. During the severe drought a few years ago, the robins wholly vanished from my garden. I neither saw nor heard one for three weeks. Meanwhile a small foreign grape-vine, rather shy of bearing, seemed to find the dusty air congenial, and, dreaming perhaps of its sweet Argos across the sea, decked itself with a score or so of fair bunches. I watched them from day to day till they should have secreted sugar enough from the sunbeams, and at last made up my mind that I would celebrate my vintage the next morning. But the robins too had somehow kept note of them. They must have sent out spies, as did the Jews into the promised land, before I was stirring. When I went with my basket, at least a dozen of these winged vintagers bustled out from among the leaves, and alighting on the nearest trees interchanged some shrill remarks about me of a derogatory nature. They had fairly sacked the vine. Not Wellington's veterans made cleaner work of a Spanish town; not Federals or Confederates were ever more impartial in the confiscation of neutral chickens. I was keeping my grapes a secret to surprise the fair Fidele with, but the robins made them a profounder secret to her than I had meant. The tattered remnant of a single bunch was all my harvest-home. How paltry it looked at the bottom of my basket, as if a humming-bird had laid her egg in an eagle's nest! I could not help laughing; and the robins seemed to join heartily in the merriment. There was a native grape-vine close by, blue with its less refined abundance, but my

cunning thieves preferred the foreign flavour. Could I tax them with want of taste?

The robins are not good solo singers, but their chorus, as, like primitive fire-worshippers, they hail the return of light and warmth to the world, is unrivalled. There are a hundred singing like one. They are noisy enough then, and sing, as poets should, with no afterthought. But when they come after cherries to the tree near my window, they muffle their voices, and their faint *pip, pip, pop!* sounds far away at the bottom of the garden, where they know I shall not suspect them of robbing the great black-walnut of its bitter-rinded store.* They are feathered Pecksniffs, to be sure, but then how brightly their breasts, that look rather shabby in the sunlight, shine in a rainy day against the dark green of the fringe-tree! After they have pinched and shaken all the life out of an earthworm, as Italian cooks pound all the spirit out of a steak, and then gulped him, they stand up in honest self-confidence, expand their red waistcoats with the virtuous air of a lobby member, and outface you with an eye that calmly challenges inquiry. "Do *I* look like a bird that knows the flavour of raw vermin? I throw myself upon a jury of my peers. Ask any robin if he ever ate anything less ascetic than the frugal berry of the juniper, and he will answer that his vow forbids him." Can such an open bosom cover such depravity? Alas, yes! I have no doubt his breast was redder at that very moment with the blood of my raspberries. On the whole, he is a doubtful friend in the garden. He makes his dessert of all kinds of berries, and is not averse from early pears. But when we remember how omnivorous he is, eating his own weight in an incredibly short time, and that Nature seems exhaustless in her invention of new insects hostile to vegetation, perhaps we may reckon that he does more good than harm.

* The screech-owl, whose cry, despite his ill name, is one of the sweetest sounds in nature, softens his voice in the same way with the most beguiling mockery of distance.

For my own part, I would rather have his cheerfulness and kind neighbourhood than many berries.

For his cousin, the catbird, I have a still warmer regard. Always a good singer, he sometimes nearly equals the brown thrush, and has the merit of keeping up his music later in the evening than any bird of my familiar acquaintance. Ever since I can remember, a pair of them have built in a gigantic syringa, near our front door, and I have known the male to sing almost uninterruptedly during the evenings of early summer till twilight duskened into dark. They differ greatly in vocal talent, but all have a delightful way of crooning over, and, as it were, rehearsing their song in an undertone, which makes their nearness always unobtrusive. Though there is the most trustworthy witness to the imitative propensity of this bird, I have only once, during an intimacy of more than forty years, heard him indulge it. In that case, the imitation was by no means so close as to deceive, but a free reproduction of the notes of some other birds, especially of the oriole, as a kind of variation in his own song. The catbird is as shy as the robin is vulgarly familiar. Only when his nest or his fledglings are approached does he become noisy and almost aggressive. I have known him to station his young in a thick cornel-bush on the edge of the raspberry-bed, after the fruit began to ripen, and feed them there for a week or more. In such cases he shows none of that conscious guilt which makes the robin contemptible. On the contrary, he will maintain his post in the thicket, and sharply scold the intruder who ventures to steal *his* berries. After all, his claim is only for tithes, while the robin will bag your entire crop if he get a chance.

Dr. Watts's statement that "birds in their little nests agree," like too many others intended to form the infant mind, is very far from being true. On the contrary, the most peaceful relation of the different species to each other is that of armed neutrality. They are very jealous of neighbours. A few years ago, I was much interested in the housebuilding of a pair of summer yellow-birds. They

had chosen a very pretty site near the top of a tall white lilac, within easy eye-shot of a chamber window. A very pleasant thing it was to see their little home growing with mutual help, to watch their industrious skill interrupted only by little flirts and snatches of endearment, frugally cut short by the common-sense of the tiny housewife. They had brought their work nearly to an end, and had already begun to line it with fern-down, the gathering of which demanded more distant journeys and longer absences. But, alas! the syringa, immemorial manor of the catbirds, was not more than twenty feet away, and these "giddy neighbours" had, as it appeared, been all along jealously watchful, though silent, witnesses of what they deemed an intrusion of squatters. No sooner were the pretty mates fairly gone for a new load of lining, than

> "To their unguarded nest these weasel Scots
> Came stealing."

Silently they flew back and forth, each giving a vengeful dab at the nest in passing. They did not fall-to and deliberately destroy it, for they might have been caught at their mischief. As it was, whenever the yellow-birds came back, their enemies were hidden in their own sight-proof bush. Several times their unconscious victims repaired damages, but at length, after counsel taken together, they gave it up. Perhaps, like other unlettered folk, they came to the conclusion that the Devil was in it, and yielded to the invisible persecutions of witchcraft.

The robins, by constant attacks and annoyances, have succeeded in driving off the blue-jays who used to build in our pines, their gay colours and quaint noisy ways making them welcome and amusing neighbours. I once had the chance of doing a kindness to a household of them, which they received with very friendly condescension. I had had my eye for some time upon a nest, and was puzzled by a constant fluttering of what seemed full-grown wings in it whenever I drew nigh. At last I climbed the tree, in spite of angry protests from the old birds against my intrusion.

The mystery had a very simple solution. In building the nest, a long piece of packthread had been somewhat loosely woven in. Three of the young had contrived to entangle themselves in it, and had become full-grown without being able to launch themselves upon the air. One was unharmed; another had so tightly twisted the cord about its shank that one foot was curled up and seemed paralysed; the third, in its struggles to escape, had sawn through the flesh of the thigh and so much harmed itself that I thought it humane to put an end to its misery. When I took out my knife to cut their hempen bonds, the heads of the family seemed to divine my friendly intent. Suddenly ceasing their cries and threats, they perched quietly within reach of my hand, and watched me in my work of manumission. This, owing to the fluttering terror of the prisoners, was an affair of some delicacy; but ere long I was rewarded by seeing one of them fly away to a neighbouring tree, while the cripple, making a parachute of his wings, came lightly to the ground, and hopped off as well as he could with one leg, obsequiously waited on by his elders. A week later I had the satisfaction of meeting him in the pine-walk, in good spirits, and already so far recovered as to be able to balance himself with the lame foot. I have no doubt that in his old age he accounted for his lameness by some handsome story of a wound received at the famous Battle of the Pines, when our tribe, overcome by numbers, was driven from its ancient camping-ground. Of late years the jays have visited us only at intervals; and in winter their bright plumage, set off by the snow, and their cheerful cry, are especially welcome. They would have furnished Æsop with a fable, for the feathered crest in which they seem to take so much satisfaction is often their fatal snare. Country boys make a hole with their finger in the snow-crust just large enough to admit the jay's head, and, hollowing it out somewhat beneath, bait it with a few kernels of corn. The crest slips easily into the trap, but refuses to be pulled out again, and he who came to feast remains a prey.

Twice have the crow-blackbirds attempted a settlement in my pines, and twice have the robins, who claim a right of pre-emption, so successfully played the part of border-ruffians as to drive them away,—to my great regret, for they are the best substitute we have for rooks. At Shady Hill (now, alas! empty of its so long loved household) they build by hundreds, and nothing can be more cheery than their creaking clatter (like a convention of old-fashioned tavern-signs) as they gather at evening to debate in mass meeting their windy politics, or to gossip at their tent-doors over the events of the day. Their port is grave, and their stalk across the turf as martial as that of a second-rate ghost in Hamlet. They never meddled with my corn, so far as I could discover.

For a few years I had crows, but their nests are an irresistible bait for boys, and their settlement was broken up. They grew so wonted as to throw off a great part of their shyness, and to tolerate my near approach. One very hot day I stood for some time within twenty feet of a mother and three children, who sat on an elm bough over my head, gasping in the sultry air, and holding their wings half-spread for coolness. All birds during the pairing season become more or less sentimental, and murmur soft nothings in a tone very unlike the grinding organ repetition and loudness of their habitual song. The crow is very comical as a lover, and to hear him trying to soften his croak to the proper Saint Preux standard has something the effect of a Mississippi boatman quoting Tennyson. Yet there are few things to my ear more melodious than his caw of a clear winter morning as it drops to you filtered through five hundred fathoms of crisp blue air. The hostility of all smaller birds makes the moral character of the crow, for all his deaconlike demeanour and garb, somewhat questionable. He could never sally forth without insult. The golden robins, especially, would chase him as far as I could follow with my eye, making him duck clumsily to avoid their importunate bills. I do not believe, however, that he robbed any nests hereabouts, for the

refuse of the gas-works, which, in our free-and-easy community, is allowed to poison the river, supplied him with dead alewives in abundance. I used to watch him making his periodical visits to the salt-marshes and coming back with a fish in his beak to his young savages, who, no doubt, like it in that condition which makes it savoury to the Kanakas and other corvine races of men.

Orioles are in great plenty with me. I have seen seven males flashing about the garden at once. A merry crew of them swing their hammocks from the pendulous boughs. During one of these latter years, when the canker-worms stripped our elms as bare as winter, these birds went to the trouble of rebuilding their unroofed nests, and chose for the purpose trees which are safe from those swarming vandals, such as the ash and the button-wood. One year a pair (disturbed, I suppose, elsewhere) built a second nest in an elm, within a few yards of the house. My friend, Edward E. Hale, told me once that the oriole rejected from his web all strands of brilliant colour, and I thought it a striking example of that instinct of concealment noticeable in many birds, though it should seem in this instance that the nest was amply protected by its position from all marauders but owls and squirrels. Last year, however, I had the fullest proof that Mr. Hale was mistaken. A pair of orioles built on the lowest trailer of a weeping elm, which hung within ten feet of our drawing-room window, and so low that I could reach it from the ground. The nest was wholly woven and felted with ravellings of woollen carpet in which scarlet predominated. Would the same thing have happened in the woods? Or did the nearness of a human dwelling perhaps give the birds a greater feeling of security? They are very bold, by the way, in quest of cordage, and I have often watched them stripping the fibrous bark from a honeysuckle growing over the very door. But, indeed, all my birds look upon me as if I were a mere tenant at will, and they were landlords. With shame I confess it, I have been bullied even by a humming-bird. This spring, as I was cleansing a pear-tree of its lichens, one of these zigzagging

blurs came purring toward me, couching his long bill like a lance, his throat sparkling with angry fire, to warn me off from a Missouri-currant whose honey he was sipping. And many a time he has driven me out of a flower-bed. This summer, by the way, a pair of these winged emeralds fastened their mossy acorn-cup upon a bough of the same elm which the orioles had enlivened the year before. We watched all their proceedings from the window through an opera-glass, and saw their two nestlings grow from black needles with a tuft of down at the lower end, till they whirled away on their first short experimental flights. They became strong of wing in a surprisingly short time, and I never saw them or the male bird after, though the female was regular as usual in her visits to our petunias and verbenas. I do not think it ground enough for a generalisation, but in the many times when I watched the old birds feeding their young, the mother always alighted, while the father as uniformly remained upon the wing.

The bobolinks are generally chance visitors, tinkling through the garden in blossoming-time, but this year, owing to the long rains early in the season, their favourite meadows were flooded, and they were driven to the upland. So I had a pair of them domiciled in my grass-field. The male used to perch in an apple-tree, then in full bloom, and, while I stood perfectly still close by, he would circle away, quivering round the entire field of five acres, with no break in his song, and settle down again among the blossoms, to be hurried away almost immediately by a new rapture of music. He had the volubility of an Italian charlatan at a fair, and, like him, appeared to be proclaiming the merits of some quack remedy. *Opodeldoc-opodeldoc-try-Doctor-Lincoln's-opodeldoc!* he seemed to repeat over and over again, with a rapidity that would have distanced the deftest-tongued Figaro that ever rattled. I remember Count Gurowski saying once, with that easy superiority of knowledge about this country which is the monopoly of foreigners, that we had no singing birds! Well, well, Mr. Hepworth Dixon has found the typical America in Oneida

and Salt Lake City. Of course, an intelligent European is the best judge of these matters. The truth is, there are more singing-birds in Europe because there are fewer forests. These songsters love the neighbourhood of man because hawks and owls are rarer, while their own food is more abundant. Most people seem to think, the more trees the more birds. Even Châteaubriand, who first tried the primitive-forest-cure, and whose description of the wilderness in its imaginative effects is unmatched, fancies the "people of the air singing their hymns to him." So far as my own observation goes, the farther one penetrates the sombre solitudes of the woods, the more seldom does he hear the voice of any singing-bird. In spite of Châteaubriand's minuteness of detail, in spite of that marvellous reverberation of the decrepit tree falling of its own weight, which he was the first to notice, I cannot help doubting whether he made his way very deep into the wilderness. At any rate, in a letter to Fontanes, written in 1804, he speaks of *mes chevaux paissant à quelque distance.* To be sure Châteaubriand was apt to mount the high horse, and this may have been but an after-thought of the *grand seigneur*, but certainly one would not make much headway on horseback toward the druid fastnesses of the primeval pine.

The bobolinks build in considerable numbers in a meadow within a quarter of a mile of us. A houseless lane passes through the midst of their camp, and in clear westerly weather, at the right season, one may hear a score of them singing at once. When they are breeding, if I chance to pass, one of the male birds always accompanies me like a constable, flitting from post to post of the rail-fence, with a short note of reproof continually repeated, till I am fairly out of the neighbourhood. Then he will swing away into the air and run down the wind, gurgling music without stint over the unheeding tussocks of meadow-grass and dark clumps of bulrushes that mark his domain.

We have no bird whose song will match the nightingale's in compass, none whose note is so rich as that of the European blackbird; but for mere rapture I have never

heard the bobolink's rival. But his opera-season is a short one. The ground and tree-sparrows are our most constant performers. It is now late in August, and one of the latter sings every day and all day long in the garden. Till within a fortnight, a pair of indigo-birds would keep up their lively *duo* for an hour together. While I write, I hear an oriole gay as in June, and the plaintive *may-be* of the goldfinch tells me he is stealing my lettuce-seeds. I know not what the experience of others may have been, but the only bird I have ever heard sing in the night has been the chip-bird. I should say he sang about as often during the darkness as cocks crow. One can hardly help fancying that he sings in his dreams.

> "Father of light, what sunnie seed,
> What glance of day hast thou confined
> Into this bird? To all the breed
> This busie ray thou hast assigned;
> Their magnetism works all night,
> And dreams of Paradise and light."

On second thought, I remember to have heard the cuckoo strike the hours nearly all night with the regularity of a Swiss clock.

The dead limbs of our elms, which I spare to that end, bring us the flicker every summer, and almost daily I hear his wild scream and laugh close at hand, himself invisible. He is a shy bird, but a few days ago I had the satisfaction of studying him through the blinds as he sat on a tree within a few feet of me. Seen so near and at rest, he makes good his claim to the title of pigeon-woodpecker. Lumberers have a notion that he is harmful to timber, digging little holes through the bark to encourage the settlement of insects. The regular rings of such perforations which one may see in almost any apple-orchard seem to give some probability to this theory. Almost every season a solitary quail visits us, and, unseen among the currant-bushes, calls *Bob White*, *Bob White*, as if he were playing at hide-and-seek with that imaginary being. A

rarer visitant is the turtle-dove, whose pleasant coo (something like the muffled crow of a cock from a coop covered with snow) I have sometimes heard, and whom I once had the good luck to see close by me in the mulberry-tree. The wild-pigeon, once numerous, I have not seen for many years.* Of savage birds, a hen-hawk now and then quarters himself upon us for a few days, sitting sluggish in a tree after a surfeit of poultry. One of them once offered me a near shot from my study-window one drizzly day for several hours. But it was Sunday, and I gave him the benefit of its gracious truce of God.

Certain birds have disappeared from our neighbourhood within my memory. I remember when the whippoorwill could be heard in Sweet Auburn. The night-hawk, once common, is now rare. The brown thrush has moved farther up country. For years I have not seen or heard any of the larger owls, whose hooting was one of my boyish terrors. The cliff-swallow, strange emigrant, that eastward takes his way, has come and gone again in my time. The bank-swallows, well-nigh innumerable during my boyhood, no longer frequent the crumbly cliff of the gravel-pit by the river. The barn-swallows, which once swarmed in our barn, flashing through the dusty sunstreaks of the mow, have been gone these many years. My father would lead me out to see them gather on the roof, and take counsel before their yearly migration, as Mr. White used to see them at Selborne. *Eheu, fugaces!* Thank fortune, the swift still glues his nest, and rolls his distant thunders night and day in the wide-throated chimneys, still sprinkles the evening air with his merry twittering. The populous heronry in Fresh Pond meadows has been well-nigh broken up, but still a pair or two haunt the old home, as the gypsies of Ellangowan their ruined huts, and every evening fly over us riverwards, clearing their throats with a hoarse hawk as they go, and, in cloudy weather, scarce higher than the tops of the chimneys. Sometimes I have known one to alight in one of our trees, though for what purpose

* They made their appearance again this summer (1870).

I never could divine. Kingfishers have sometimes puzzled me in the same way, perched at high noon in a pine, springing their watchman's rattle when they flitted away from my curiosity, and seeming to shove their top-heavy heads along as a man does a wheel-barrow.

Some birds have left us, I suppose, because the country is growing less wild. I once found a summer duck's nest within a quarter of a mile of our house, but such a *trouvaille* would be impossible now as Kidd's treasure. And yet the mere taming of the neighbourhood does not quite satisfy me as an explanation. Twenty years ago, on my way to bathe in the river, I saw every day a brace of woodcock, on the miry edge of a spring within a few rods of a house, and constantly visited by thirsty cows. There was no growth of any kind to conceal them, and yet these ordinarily shy birds were almost as indifferent to my passing as common poultry would have been. Since bird-nesting has become scientific, and dignified itself as oölogy, that, no doubt, is partly to blame for some of our losses. But some old friends are constant. Wilson's thrush comes every year to remind me of that most poetic of ornithologists. He flits before me through the pine-walk like the very genius of solitude. A pair of pewees have built immemorially on a jutting brick in the arched entrance to the ice-house. Always on the same brick, and never more than a single pair, though two broods of five each are raised there every summer. How do they settle their claim to the homestead? By what right of primogeniture? Once the children of a man employed about the place *oölogized* the nest, and the pewees left us for a year or two. I felt towards those boys as the messmates of the Ancient Mariner did towards him after he had shot the albatross. But the pewees came back at last, and one of them is now on his wonted perch, so near my window that I can hear the click of his bill as he snaps a fly on the wing with the unerring precision a stately Trasteverina shows in the capture of her smaller deer. The pewee is the first bird to pipe up in the morning; and during the early summer he preludes his matutinal

ejaculation of *pewee* with a slender whistle, unheard at any other time. He saddens with the season, and, as summer declines, he changes his note *eheu, pewee!* as if in lamentation. Had he been an Italian bird, Ovid would have had a plaintive tale to tell about him. He is so familiar as often to pursue a fly through the open window into my library.

There is something inexpressibly dear to me in these old friendships of a lifetime. There is scarce a tree of mine but has had, at some time or other, a happy homestead among its boughs, to which I cannot say,

> "Many light hearts and wings,
> Which now be dead, lodged in thy living bowers."

My walk under the pines would lose half its summer charm were I to miss that shy anchorite, the Wilson's thrush, nor hear in haying-time the metallic ring of his song, that justifies his rustic name of *scythe-whet*. I protect my game as jealously as an English squire. If anybody had oölogized a certain cuckoo's nest I know of (I have a pair in my garden every year), it would have left me a sore place in my mind for weeks. I love to bring these aborigines back to the mansuetude they showed to the early voyagers, and before (forgive the involuntary pun) they had grown accustomed to man and knew his savage ways. And they repay your kindness with a sweet familiarity too delicate ever to breed contempt. I have made a Penn-treaty with them, preferring that to the Puritan way with the natives, which converted them to a little Hebraism and a great deal of Medford rum. If they will not come near enough to me (as most of them will), I bring them close with an opera-glass—a much better weapon than a gun. I would not, if I could, convert them from their pretty pagan ways. The only ones I sometimes have savage doubts about is the red squirrel. I *think* he oölogizes. I *know* he eats cherries (we counted five of them at one time in a single tree, the stones pattering down like the sparse hail that preludes a storm), and that he gnaws off the small end of pears to get at the seeds. He steals the corn from under the noses of

my poultry. But what would you have? He will come down upon the limb of the tree I am lying under till he is within a yard of me. He and his mate will scurry up and down the great black-walnut for my diversion, chattering like monkeys. Can I sign his death-warrant who has tolerated me about his grounds so long? Not I. Let them steal, and welcome. I am sure I should, had I had the same bringing up and the same temptation. As for the birds, I do not believe there is one of them but does more good than harm; and of how many featherless bipeds can this be said?

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## *A GOOD WORD FOR WINTER.*

"MEN scarcely know how beautiful fire is," says Shelley; and I am apt to think there are a good many other things concerning which their knowledge might be largely increased without becoming burdensome. Nor are they altogether reluctant to be taught—not so reluctant, perhaps, as unable—and education is sure to find one fulcrum ready to her hand by which to get a purchase on them. For most of us, I have noticed, are not without an amiable willingness to assist at any spectacle or entertainment (loosely so called) for which no fee is charged at the door. If special tickets are sent us, another element of pleasure is added in a sense of privilege and pre-eminence (pitiably scarce in a democracy), so deeply rooted in human nature that I have seen people take a strange satisfaction in being near of kin to the mute chief personage in a funeral. It gave them a moment's advantage over the rest of us whose grief was rated at a lower place in the procession. But the words "admission free" at the bottom of a handbill, though holding out no bait of inequality, have yet a singular charm for many minds, especially in the country. There is something touching in the constancy with which men attend

free lectures, and in the honest patience with which they listen to them. He who pays may yawn and shift testily in his seat, or even go out with an awful reverberation of criticism, for he has bought the right to do any or all of these and paid for it. But gratuitous hearers are anæsthetised to suffering by a sense of virtue. They are performing perhaps the noblest, as it is one of the most difficult, of human functions in getting Something (no matter how small) for Nothing. They are not pestered by the awful duty of securing their money's worth. They are wasting time, to do which elegantly and without lassitude is the highest achievement of civilisation. If they are cheated, it is, at worst, only of a superfluous hour which was rotting on their hands. Not only is mere amusement made more piquant, but instruction more palatable, by this universally relished sauce of gratuity. And if the philosophic observer finds an object of agreeable contemplation in the audience, as they listen to a discourse on the probability of making missionaries go down better with the Feejee-Islanders by balancing the hymn-book in one pocket with a bottle of Worcestershire in the other, or to a plea for arming the female gorilla with the ballot, he also takes a friendly interest in the lecturer, and admires the wise economy of Nature who thus contrives an ample field of honest labour for her bores. Even when the insidious hat is passed round after one of these eleemosynary feasts, the relish is but heightened by a conscientious refusal to disturb the satisfaction's completeness with the rattle of a single contributory penny. So firmly persuaded am I of this *gratis*-instinct in our common humanity, that I believe I could fill a house by advertising a free lecture on Tupper considered as a philosophic poet, or on my personal recollections of the late James K. Polk. This being so, I have sometimes wondered that the peep-shows which Nature provides with such endless variety for her children, and to which we are admitted on the bare condition of having eyes, should be so generally neglected. To be sure, eyes are not so common as people think, or poets would be plentier,

and perhaps also these exhibitions of hers are cheapened in estimation by the fact that in enjoying them we are not getting the better of anybody else. Your true lovers of nature, however, contrive to get even *this* solace; and Wordsworth, looking upon mountains as his own peculiar sweethearts, was jealous of anybody else who ventured upon even the most innocent flirtation with them. As if *such* fellows, indeed, could pretend to that nicer sense of what-d'ye-call-it which was so remarkable in him! Marry come up! Mountains, no doubt, may inspire a profounder and more exclusive passion, but on the whole I am not sorry to have been born and bred among more domestic scenes, where I can be hospitable without a pang. I am going to ask you presently to take pot-luck with me at a board where Winter shall supply whatever there is of cheer.

I think the old fellow has hitherto had scant justice done him in the main. We make him the symbol of old age or death, and think we have settled the matter. As if old age were never kindly as well as frosty; as if it had no reverend graces of its own as good in their way as the noisy impertinence of childhood, the elbowing self-conceit of youth, or the pompous mediocrity of middle life. As if there were anything discreditable in death, or nobody had ever longed for it! Suppose we grant that Winter is the sleep of the year, what then? I take it upon me to say that his dreams are finer than the best reality of his waking rivals.

"Sleep, Silence' child, the father of soft Rest,"

is a very agreeable acquaintance, and most of us are better employed in his company than anywhere else. For my own part, I think Winter a pretty wide-awake old boy, and his bluff sincerity and hearty ways are more congenial to my mood, and more wholesome for me, than any charms of which his rivals are capable. Spring is a fickle mistress, who either does not know her own mind, or is so long in making it up, whether

you shall have her or not have her, that one gets tired at last of her pretty miffs and reconciliations. You go to her to be cheered up a bit, and ten to one catch her in the sulks, expecting you to find enough good humour for both. After she has become Mrs. Summer she grows a little more staid in her demeanour, and her abundant table, where you are sure to get the earliest fruits and vegetables of the season, is a good foundation for steady friendship; but she has lost that delicious aroma of maidenhood, and what was delicately rounded grace in the girl gives more than hints of something like redundance in the matron. Autumn is the poet of the family. He gets you up a splendour that you would say was made out of real sunset; but it is nothing more than a few hectic leaves, when all is done. He is but a sentimentalist, after all; a kind of Lamartine whining along the ancestral avenues he has made bare timber of, and begging a contribution of good spirits from your own savings to keep him in countenance. But Winter has his delicate sensibilities too, only he does not make them as good as indelicate by thrusting them forever in your face. He is a better poet than Autumn, when he has a mind, but, like a truly great one as he is, he brings you down to your bare manhood, and bids you understand him out of that, with no adventitious helps of association, or he will none of you. He does not touch those melancholy chords on which Autumn is as great a master as Heine. Well, is there no such thing as thrumming on them and maundering over them till they get out of tune, and you wish some manly hand would crash through them and leave them dangling brokenly for ever? Take Winter as you find him, and he turns out to be a thoroughly honest fellow, with no nonsense in him, and tolerating none in you, which is a great comfort in the long run. He is not what they call a genial critic, but bring a real man along with you, and you will find there is a crabbed generosity about the old cynic that you would not exchange for all the creamy concessions of Autumn. "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness," quotha? That's just it; Winter soon blows

your head clear of fog and makes you see things as they are. I thank him for it! The truth is, between ourselves, I have a very good opinion of the whole family, who always welcome me without making me feel as if I were too much of a poor relation. There ought to be some kind of distance, never so little, you know, to give the true relish. They are as good company, the worst of them, as any I know, and I am not a little flattered by a condescension from any one of them; but I happen to hold Winter's retainer this time, and, like an honest advocate, am bound to make as good a showing as I can for him, even if it cost a few slurs upon the rest of the household. Moreover, Winter is coming, and one would like to get on the blind side of him.

The love of Nature in and for herself, or as a mirror for the moods of the mind, is a modern thing. The fleeing to her as an escape from man was brought into fashion by Rousseau; for his prototype Petrarch, though he had a taste for pretty scenery, had a true antique horror for the grander aspects of nature. He got once to the top of Mount Ventoux, but it is very plain that he did not enjoy it. Indeed, it is only within a century or so that the search after the picturesque has been a safe employment. It is not so even now in Greece or Southern Italy. Where the Anglo-Saxon carves his cold fowl, and leaves the relics of his picnic, the ancient or mediæval man might be pretty confident that some ruffian would try the edge of his knife on a chicken of the Platonic sort, and leave more precious bones as an offering to the genius of the place. The ancients were certainly more social than we, though that, perhaps, was natural enough, when a good part of the world was still covered with forest. They huddled together in cities as well for safety as to keep their minds warm. The Romans had a fondness for country life, but they had fine roads, and Rome was always within easy reach. The author of the Book of Job is the earliest I know of who showed any profound sense of the moral meaning of the outward world; and I think none has approached him since, though Wordsworth comes nearest with the first two books of the

"Prelude." But their feeling is not precisely of the kind I speak of as modern, and which gave rise to what is called descriptive poetry. Chaucer opens his Clerk's Tale with a bit of landscape admirable for its large style, and as well composed as any Claude.

> "There is right at the west end of Itaille,
> Down at the root of Vesulus the cold,
> A lusty plain abundant of vitaille,
> Where many a tower and town thou mayst behold,
> That founded were in time of fathers old,
> And many an other délectable sight;
> And Saluces this noble country hight."

What an airy precision of touch there is here, and what a sure eye for the points of character in landscape! But the picture is altogether subsidiary. No doubt the works of Salvator Rosa and Gaspar Poussin show that there must have been some amateur taste for the grand and terrible in scenery; but the British poet Thomson ("sweet-souled" is Wordsworth's apt word) was the first to do with words what they had done partially with colours. He was turgid, no good metrist, and his English is like a translation from one of those poets who wrote in Latin after it was dead; but he was a man of sincere genius, and not only English, but European literature is largely in his debt. He was the inventor of cheap amusement for the million, to be had of All-out-doors for the asking. It was his impulse which unconsciously gave direction to Rousseau, and it is to the school of Jean Jacques that we owe St. Pierre, Cowper, Châteaubriand, Wordsworth, Byron, Lamartine, George Sand, Ruskin—the great painters of ideal landscape.

So long as men had slender means, whether of keeping out cold or checkmating it with artificial heat, Winter was an unwelcome guest, especially in the country. There he was the bearer of a *lettre de cachet*, which shut its victims in solitary confinement with few resources but to boose round the fire and repeat ghost-stories, which had lost all their freshness and none of their terror. To go to bed was to lie awake of cold, with an added shudder of fright

whenever a loose casement or a waving curtain chose to give you the goose-flesh. Bussy Rabutin, in one of his letters, gives us a notion how uncomfortable it was in the country, with green wood, smoky chimneys, and doors and windows that thought it was their duty to make the wind whistle, not to keep it out. With fuel so dear, it could not have been much better in the city, to judge by Ménage's warning against the danger of our dressing-gowns taking fire, while we cuddle too closely over the sparing blaze. The poet of Winter himself is said to have written in bed, with his hand through a hole in the blanket; and we may suspect that it was the warmth quite as much as the company that first drew men together at the coffee-house. Coleridge, in January 1800, writes to Wedgewood: "I am sitting by a fire in a rug greatcoat. . . . It is most barbarously cold, and you, I fear, can shield yourself from it only by perpetual imprisonment." This thermometrical view of winter is, I grant, a depressing one; for I think there is nothing so demoralising as cold. I know of a boy who, when his father, a bitter economist, was brought home dead, said only, "Now we can burn as much wood as we like." I would not off-hand prophesy the gallows for that boy. I remember with a shudder a pinch I got from the cold once in a railroad-car. A born fanatic of fresh air, I found myself glad to see the windows hermetically sealed by the freezing vapour of our breath, and plotted the assassination of the conductor every time he opened the door. I felt myself sensibly barbarising, and would have shared Colonel Jack's bed in the ash-hole of the glass-furnace with a grateful heart. Since then I have had more charity for the prevailing ill-opinion of winter. It was natural enough that Ovid should measure the years of his exile in Pontus by the number of winters.

> "Ut sumus in Ponto, ter frigore constitit Ister,
> Facta est Euxini dura ter unda maris."
>
> "Thrice hath the cold bound Ister fast, since I
> In Pontus was, thrice Euxine's wave made hard."

Jubinal has printed an Anglo-Norman piece of doggerel in which Winter and Summer dispute which is the better man. It is not without a kind of rough and inchoate humour, and I like it because old Whitebeard gets tolerably fair play. The jolly old fellow boasts of his rate of living, with that contempt of poverty which is the weak spot in the burly English nature.

"Jà Dieu ne place que me avyenge
Que ne face plus honour
Et plus despenz en un soul jour
Que vus en tote vostre vie:"

"Now God forbid it hap to me
That I make not more great display,
And spend more in a single day
Than you can do in all your life."

The best touch, perhaps, is Winter's claim for credit as a mender of the highways, which was not without point when every road in Europe was a quagmire during a good part of the year unless it was bottomed on some remains of Roman engineering.

"Je su, fet-il, seignur et mestre
Et à bon droit le dey estre,
Quant de la bowe face cancé
Par un petit de geelé:"

"Master and lord I am, says he,
And of good right so ought to be,
Since I make causeys, safely crost,
Of mud, with just a pinch of frost."

But there is no recognition of Winter as the best of out-door company.

Even Emerson, an open-air man, and a bringer of it, if ever any, confesses,

"The frost-king ties my fumbling feet,
Sings in my ear, my hands are stones,
Curdles the blood to the marble bones,
Tugs at the heartstrings, numbs the sense,
And hems in life with narrowing fence."

Winter was literally "the inverted year," as Thomson called him; for such entertainments as could be had must be got within doors. What cheerfulness there was in brumal verse was that of Horace's *dissolve frigus ligna super foco large reponens*, so pleasantly associated with the cleverest scene in *Roderick Random*. This is the tone of that poem of Walton's friend Cotton, which won the praise of Wordsworth :—

"Let us home,
Our mortal enemy is come:
Winter and all his blustering train
Have made a voyage o'er the main.

. . . . .

Fly, fly, the foe advances fast,
Into our fortress let us haste,
Where all the roarers of the north
Can neither storm nor starve us forth.

.

There underground a magazine
Of sovereign juice is cellared in,
Liquor that will the siege maintain
Should Phœbus ne'er return again.

. . . .

Whilst we together jovial sit
Careless, and crowned with mirth and wit,
Where, though bleak winds confine us home,
Our fancies round the world shall roam."

Thomson's view of Winter is also, on the whole, a hostile one, though he does justice to his grandeur.

"Thus Winter falls,
A heavy gloom oppressive o'er the world,
Through Nature shedding influence malign."

He finds his consolations, like Cotton, in the house, though more refined :—

"While without
The ceaseless winds blow ice, be my retreat
Between the groaning forest and the shore
Beat by the boundless multitude of waves,
A rural, sheltered, solitary scene,
Where ruddy fire and beaming tapers join
To cheer the gloom. There studious let me sit
And hold high converse with the mighty dead."

Doctor Akenside, a man to be spoken of with respect, follows Thomson. With him, too, "Winter desolates the year," and

> "How pleasing wears the wintry night
> Spent with the old illustrious dead!
> While by the taper's trembling light
> I seem those awful scenes to tread
> Where chiefs or legislators lie," etc.

Akenside had evidently been reading Thomson. He had the conceptions of a great poet with less faculty than many a little one, and is one of those versifiers of whom it is enough to say that we are always willing to break him off in the middle with an etc., well knowing that what follows is but the coming-round again of what went before, marching in a circle with the cheap numerosity of a stage-army. In truth, it is no wonder that the short days of that cloudy northern climate should have added to winter a gloom borrowed of the mind. We hardly know, till we have experienced the contrast, how sensibly our winter is alleviated by the longer daylight and the pellucid atmosphere. I once spent a winter in Dresden, a southern climate compared with England, and really almost lost my respect for the sun when I saw him groping among the chimney-pots opposite my windows as he described his impoverished arc in the sky. The enforced seclusion of the season makes it the time for serious study and occupations that demand fixed incomes of unbroken time. This is why Milton said "that his vein never happily flowed but from the autumnal equinox to the vernal," though in his twentieth year he had written, on the return of spring,—

> "Fallor? an et nobis redeunt in carmina vires
> Ingeniumque mihi munere veris adest?"

> "Err I? or do the powers of song return
> To me, and genius too, the gifts of Spring?"

Goethe, so far as I remember, was the first to notice the

cheerfulness of snow in sunshine. His *Harz-reise im Winter* gives no hint of it, for that is a diluted reminiscence of Greek tragic choruses and the Book of Job in nearly equal parts. In one of the singularly interesting and characteristic letters to Frau von Stein, however, written during the journey, he says: "It is beautiful indeed; the mist heaps itself together in light snow-clouds, the sun looks through, and the snow over everything gives back a feeling of gaiety." But I find in Cowper the first recognition of a general amiability in Winter. The gentleness of his temper, and the wide charity of his sympathies, made it natural for him to find good in everything except the human heart. A dreadful creed distilled from the darkest moments of dyspeptic solitaries compelled him against his will to see in *that* the one evil thing made by a God whose goodness is over all His works. Cowper's two walks in the morning and noon of a winter's day are delightful, so long as he contrives to let himself be happy in the graciousness of the landscape. Your muscles grow springy, and your lungs dilate with the crisp air as you walk along with him. You laugh with him at the grotesque shadow of your legs lengthened across the snow by the just-risen sun. I know nothing that gives a purer feeling of out-door exhilaration than the easy verses of this escaped hypochondriac. But Cowper also preferred his sheltered garden-walk to those robuster joys, and bitterly acknowledged the depressing influence of the darkened year. In December 1780 he writes: "At this season of the year, and in this gloomy, uncomfortable climate, it is no easy matter for the owner of a mind like mine to divert it from sad subjects, and to fix it upon such as may administer to its amusement." Or was it because he was writing to the dreadful Newton? Perhaps his poetry bears truer witness to his habitual feeling, for it is only there that poets disenthral themselves of their reserve and become fully possessed of their greatest charm —the power of being franker than other men. In the Third Book of "The Task" he boldly affirms his preference of the country to the city even in winter:—

"But are not wholesome airs, though unperfumed
By roses, and clear suns, though scarcely felt,
And groves, if inharmonious, yet secure
From clamour, and whose very silence charms,
To be preferred to smoke? . . .
They would be, were not madness in the head
And folly in the heart; were England now
What England was, plain, hospitable, kind,
And undebauched."

The conclusion shows, however, that he was thinking mainly of fireside delights, not of the blusterous companionship of nature. This appears even more clearly in the Fourth Book:—

"O Winter, ruler of the inverted year;"

but I cannot help interrupting him to say how pleasant it always is to track poets through the gardens of their predecessors and find out their likings by a flower snapped off here and there to garnish their own nosegays. Cowper had been reading Thomson, and "the inverted year" pleased his fancy with its suggestion of that starry wheel of the zodiac moving round through its spaces infinite. He could not help loving a handy Latinism (especially with elision beauty added) any more than Gray, any more than Wordsworth—on the sly. But the member for Olney has the floor:—

"O Winter, ruler of the inverted year,
Thy scattered hair with sleet-like ashes filled,
Thy breath congealed upon thy lips, thy cheeks
Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
Than those of age, thy forehead wrapt in clouds,
A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
A sliding car, indebted to no wheels,
But urged by storms along its slippery way,
I love thee all unlovely as thou seem'st,
And dreaded as thou art! Thou hold'st the sun
A prisoner in the yet undawning east,
Shortening his journey between morn and noon,
And hurrying him, impatient of his stay,
Down to the rosy west, but kindly still
Compensating his loss with added hours
Of social converse and instructive ease,

> And gathering at short notice, in one group,
> The family dispersed, and fixing thought,
> Not less dispersed by daylight and its cares.
> I crown thee king of intimate delights,
> Fireside enjoyments, homeborn happiness,
> And all the comforts that the lowly roof
> Of undisturbed Retirement, and the hours
> Of long uninterrupted evening know."

I call this a good *human* bit of writing, imaginative, too —not so flushed, not so . . . highfaluting (let me dare the odious word!) as the modern style since poets have got hold of a theory that imagination is common-sense turned inside out, and not common-sense sublimed— but wholesome, masculine, and strong in the simplicity of a mind wholly occupied with its theme. To me Cowper is still the best of our descriptive poets for every-day wear. And what unobtrusive skill he has! How he heightens, for example, your sense of winter-evening seclusion, by the twanging horn of the postman on the bridge! That horn has rung in my ears ever since I first heard it, during the consulate of the second Adams. Wordsworth strikes a deeper note; but does it not sometimes come over one (just the least in the world) that one would give anything for a bit of nature pure and simple, without quite so strong a flavour of W. W.? W. W. is, of course, sublime and all that—but! For my part, I will make a clean breast of it, and confess that I cannot look at a mountain without fancying the late laureate's gigantic Roman nose thrust between me and it, and thinking of Dean Swift's profane version of *Romanos rerum dominos* into *Roman nose / a rare un / dom your nose /* But do I judge verses, then, by the impression made on me by the man who wrote them? Not so fast, my good friend, but, for good or evil, the character and its intellectual product are inextricably interfused.

If I remember aright, Wordsworth himself (except in his magnificent skating scene in the "Prelude") has not much to say for winter out of doors. I cannot recall any picture by him of a snow-storm. The reason may possibly be that

in the Lake Country even the winter storms bring rain rather than snow. He was thankful for the Christmas visits of Crabb Robinson, because they "helped him through the winter." His only hearty praise of winter is when, as Général Février, he defeats the French :—

> "Humanity, delighting to behold
> A fond reflection of her own decay,
> Hath painted Winter like a traveller old,
> Propped on a staff, and, through the sullen day,
> In hooded mantle, limping o'er the plain
> As though his weakness were disturbed by pain:
> Or, if a juster fancy should allow
> An undisputed symbol of command,
> The chosen sceptre is a withered bough
> Infirmly grasped within a withered hand.
> These emblems suit the helpless and forlorn ;
> But mighty Winter the device shall scorn."

The Scottish poet Grahame, in his "Sabbath," says manfully :—

> "Now is the time
> To visit Nature in her grand attire ;"

and he has one little picture which no other poet has surpassed :—

> "High-ridged the whirlëd drift has almost reached
> The powdered keystone of the churchyárd porch:
> Mute hangs the hooded bell ; the tombs lie buried."

Even in our own climate, where the sun shows his winter face as long and as brightly as in central Italy, the seduction of the chimney-corner is apt to predominate in the mind over the severer satisfactions of muffled fields and penitential woods. The very title of Whittier's delightful "Snow-Bound" shows what *he* was thinking of, though he does not vapour a little about digging out paths. The verses of Emerson, perfect as a Greek fragment (despite the archaism of a dissyllabic fire), which he has chosen for his epigraph, tell us too how the

> "Housemates sit
> Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
> In a tumultuous privacy of storm."

They are all in a tale. It is always the *tristis Hiems* of Virgil. Catch one of them having a kind word for old Barbe Fleurie, unless he whines through some cranny, like a beggar, to heighten their enjoyment while they toast their slippered toes. I grant there is a keen relish of contrast about the bickering flame as it gives an emphasis beyond Gherardo della Notte to loved faces, or kindles the gloomy gold of volumes scarce less friendly, especially when a tempest is blundering round the house. Wordsworth has a fine touch that brings home to us the comfortable contrast of without and within, during a storm at night, and the passage is highly characteristic of a poet whose inspiration always has an undertone of *bourgeois*:—

> "How touching, when, at midnight, sweep
> Snow-muffled winds, and all is dark,
> To hear,—and sink again to sleep!"

J. H., one of those choice poets who will not tarnish their bright fancies by publication, always insists on a snow-storm as essential to the true atmosphere of whist. Mrs. Battles, in her famous rule for the game, implies winter, and would doubtless have added tempest, if it could be had for the asking. For a good solid read also, into the small hours, there is nothing like that sense of safety against having your evening laid waste, which Euroclydon brings, as he bellows down the chimney, making your fire gasp, or rustles snow flakes against the pane with a sound more soothing than silence. Emerson, as he is apt to do, not only hit the nail on the head, but drove it home, in that last phrase of the "tumultuous privacy."

But I would exchange this, and give something to boot, for the privilege of walking out into the vast blur of a north-north-east snow-storm, and getting a strong draught on the furnace within, by drawing the first furrows through its sandy drifts. I love those

> "Noontide twilights which snow makes
> With tempest of the blinding flakes."

If the wind veer too much toward the east, you get the heavy snow that gives a true Alpine slope to the boughs of your evergreens, and traces a skeleton of your elms in white; but you must have plenty of north in your gale if you want those driving nettles of frost that sting the cheeks to a crimson manlier than that of fire. During the great storm of two winters ago, the most robustious periwig-pated fellow of late years, I waded and floundered a couple of miles through the whispering night, and brought home that feeling of expansion we have after being in good company. "Great things doeth He which we cannot comprehend; for He saith to the snow, 'Be thou on the earth.'"

There is admirable snow scenery in Judd's "Margaret," but some one has confiscated my copy of that admirable book, and, perhaps, Homer's picture of a snow-storm is the best yet in its large simplicity:—

"And as in winter-time, when Jove his cold sharp javelins throws
Amongst us mortals, and is moved to white the earth with snows,
The winds asleep, he freely pours till highest prominents,
Hill-tops, low meadows, and the fields that crown with most contents
The toils of men, seaports and shores, are hid, and every place,
But floods, that fair snow's tender flakes, as their own brood, embrace.'

Chapman, after all, though he makes very free with him, comes nearer Homer than anybody else. There is nothing in the original of that fair snow's tender flakes, but neither Pope nor Cowper could get out of their heads the Psalmist's tender phrase, "He giveth his snow like wool," for which also Homer affords no hint. Pope talks of "dissolving fleeces," and Cowper of a "fleecy mantle." But David is nobly simple, while Pope is simply nonsensical, and Cowper pretty. If they must have prettiness, Martial would have supplied them with it in his

"Densum tacitarum vellus aquarum,"

which is too pretty, though I fear it would have pleased Dr. Donne. Eustathius of Thessalonica called snow ἔριωδες ὕδωρ, woolly water, which a poor old French poet, Godeau, has amplified into this:—

> " Lorsque la froidure inhumaine
> De leur verd ornement depouille les forêts
> Sous une neige épaisse il couvre les guérets,
> Et la neige a pour eux la chaleur de la laine."

In this, as in Pope's version of the passage in Homer, there is, at least, a sort of suggestion of snow-storm in the blinding drift of words. But, on the whole, if one would know what snow is, I should advise him not to hunt up what the poets have said about it, but to look at the sweet miracle itself.

The preludings of Winter are as beautiful as those of Spring. In a grey December day, when, as the farmers say, it is too cold to snow, his numbed fingers will let fall doubtfully a few star-shaped flakes, the snowdrops and anemones that harbinger his more assured reign. Now, and now only, may be seen, heaped on the horizon's eastern edge, those "blue clouds" from forth which Shakespeare says that Mars "doth pluck the masoned turrets." Sometimes also, when the sun is low, you will see a single cloud trailing a flurry of snow along the southern hills in a wavering fringe of purple. And when at last the real snow-storm comes, it leaves the earth with a virginal look on it that no other of the seasons can rival, compared with which, indeed, they seem soiled and vulgar.

And what is there in nature so beautiful as the next morning after such confusion of the elements? Night has no silence like this of busy day. All the batteries of noise are spiked. We see the movement of life as a deaf man sees it, a mere wraith of the clamorous existence that inflicts itself on our ears when the ground is bare. The earth is clothed in innocence as a garment. Every wound of the landscape is healed; whatever was stiff has been sweetly rounded as the breasts of Aphrodite; what was unsightly has been covered gently with a soft splendour, as if, Cowley would have said, Nature had cleverly let fall her handkerchief to hide it. If the virgin (*Nôtre Dame de la neige*) were to come back, here is an earth that would not bruise her foot nor stain it. It is

> "The fanned snow
> That's bolted by the northern blasts twice o'er,"—
> "Soffiata e stretta dai venti Schiavi,
> Winnowed and packed by the Sclavonian winds,"—

packed so hard sometimes on hill-slopes that it will bear your weight. What grace is in all the curves, as if every one of them had been swept by that inspired thumb of Phidias's journeyman.

Poets have fancied the footprints of the wind in those light ripples that sometimes scurry across smooth water with a sudden blur. But on this gleaming hush the aerial deluge has left plain marks of its course; and in gullies through which it rushed torrent-like, the eye finds its bed irregularly scooped like that of a brook in hard beach-sand, or, in more sheltered spots, traced with outlines like those left by the sliding edges of the surf upon the shore. The air, after all, is only an infinitely thinner kind of water, such as I suppose we shall have to drink when the state does her whole duty as a moral reformer. Nor is the wind the only thing whose trail you will notice on this sensitive surface. You will find that you have more neighbours and night visitors than you dreamed of. Here is the dainty footprint of a cat; here a dog has looked in on you like an amateur watchman to see if all is right, slumping clumsily about in the mealy treachery. And look! before you were up in the morning, though you were a punctual courtier at the sun's levee, here has been a squirrel zigzagging to and fro like a hound gathering the scent, and some tiny bird searching for unimaginable food, perhaps for the tinier creature, whatever it is, that drew this slender continuous trail like those made on the wet beach by light borderers of the sea. The earliest autographs were as frail as these. Poseidon traced his lines, or giant birds made their mark, on pre-Adamite sea-margins; and the thunder-gust left the tear-stains of its sudden passion there; nay, we have the signatures of delicatest fern-leaves on the soft ooze of æons that dozed away their dreamless leisure before consciousness came upon the earth with man. Some whim of nature

locked them fast in stone for us after-thoughts of creation. Which of us shall leave a footprint as imperishable as that of the ornithorhyncus, or much more so than that of these Bedouins of the snow-desert? Perhaps it was only because the ripple and the rain-drop and the bird were not thinking of themselves, that they had such luck. The chances of immortality depend very much on that. How often have we not seen poor mortals, dupes of a season's notoriety, carving their names on seeming-solid rock of merest beach-sand, whose feeble hold on memory shall be washed away by the next wave of fickle opinion! Well, well, honest Jacques, there are better things to be found in the snow than sermons.

The snow that falls damp comes commonly in larger flakes from windless skies, and is the prettiest of all to watch from under cover. This is the kind Homer had in mind; and Dante, who had never read him, compares the *dilatate falde*, the flaring flakes, of his fiery rain, to those of snow among the mountains without wind. This sort of snowfall has no fight in it, and does not challenge you to a wrestle like that which drives well from the northward, with all moisture thoroughly winnowed out of it by the frosty wind. Burns, who was more out of doors than most poets, and whose bare-foot Muse got the colour in her cheeks by vigorous exercise in all weathers, was thinking of this drier deluge when he speaks of the "whirling drift," and tells how—

> "Chanticleer
> Shook off the pouthery snaw."

But the damper and more deliberate falls have a choice knack at draping the trees; and about eaves of stone walls —wherever, indeed, the evaporation is rapid, and it finds a chance to cling—it will build itself out in curves of wonderful beauty. I have seen one of these dumb waves, thus caught in the act of breaking, curl four feet beyond the edge of my roof and hang there for days, as if Nature were too well pleased with her work to let it crumble from

its exquisite pause. After such a storm, if you are lucky enough to have even a sluggish ditch for a neighbour, be sure to pay it a visit. You will find its banks corniced with what seems to be precipitated light, and the dark current down below gleams as if with an inward lustre. Dull of motion as it is, you never saw water that seemed alive before. It has a brightness like that of the eyes of some smaller animals, which gives assurance of life, but of a life foreign and unintelligible.

A damp snow-storm often turns to rain, and, in our freakish climate, the wind will whisk sometimes into the north-west, so suddenly as to plate all the trees with crystal before it has swept the sky clear of its last cobweb of cloud. Ambrose Philips, in a poetical epistle from Copenhagen to the Earl of Dorset, describes this strange confectionery of Nature,—for such, I am half ashamed to say, it always seems to me, recalling the "glorified sugar-candy" of Lamb's first night at the theatre. It has an artificial air, altogether beneath the grand artist of the atmosphere, and besides does too much mischief to the trees for a philodendrist to take unmixed pleasure in it. Perhaps it deserves a poet like Philips, who really loved Nature, and yet liked her to be mighty fine, as Pepys would say, with a heightening of powder and rouge :—

> "And yet but lately have I seen e'en here
> The winter in a lovely dress appear.
> Ere yet the clouds let fall the treasured snow,
> Or winds begun through hazy skies to blow,
> At evening a keen eastern breeze arose,
> And the descending rain unsullied froze.
> Soon as the silent shades of night withdrew,
> The ruddy noon disclosed at once to view
> The face of Nature in a rich disguise,
> And brightened every object to my eyes;
> For every shrub, and every blade of grass,
> And every pointed thorn, seemed wrought in glass;
> In pearls and rubies rich the hawthorns show,
> And through the ice the crimson berries glow;
> The thick-sprung reeds, which watery marshes yield,
> Seem polished lances in a hostile field;

> The stag in limpid currents with surprise
> Sees crystal branches on his forehead rise:
> The spreading oak, the beech, the towering pine,
> Glazed over in the freezing ether shine;
> The frighted birds the rattling branches shun,
> Which wave and glitter in the distant sun,
> When, if a sudden gust of wind arise,
> The brittle forest into atoms flies,
> The crackling wood beneath the tempest bends,
> And in a spangled shower the prospect ends."

It is not uninstructive to see how tolerable Ambrose is, so long as he sticks manfully to what he really saw. The moment he undertakes to improve on Nature he sinks into the mere court poet, and we surrender him to the jealousy of Pope without a sigh. His "rattling branches" and "crackling forest" are good, as truth always is, after a fashion; but what shall we say of that dreadful stag which, there is little doubt, he valued above all the rest, because it was purely his own?

The damper snow tempts the amateur architect and sculptor. His Pentelicus has been brought to his very door, and if there are boys to be had (whose company beats all other recipes for prolonging life), a middle-aged Master of the Works will knock the years off his account and make the family Bible seem a dealer in foolish fables, by a few hours given heartily to this business. First comes the Sisyphean toil of rolling the clammy balls till they refuse to budge farther. Then, if you would play the statuary, they are piled one upon the other to the proper height; or if your aim be masonry, whether of house or fort, they must be squared and beaten solid with the shovel. The material is capable of very pretty effects, and your young companions meanwhile are unconsciously learning lessons in æsthetics. From the feeling of satisfaction with which one squats on the damp floor of his extemporised dwelling, I have been led to think that the backwoodsman must get a sweeter savour of self-reliance from the house his own hands have built than Bramante or Sansovino could ever give. Perhaps the fort is the best thing, for it calls out

more masculine qualities and adds the cheer of battle with that dumb artillery which gives pain enough to test pluck without risk of serious hurt. Already, as I write, it is twenty odd years ago. The balls fly thick and fast. The uncle defends the waist-high ramparts against a storm of nephews, his breast plastered with decorations like another Radetzky's. How well I recall the indomitable good-humour under fire of him who fell in the front at Ball's Bluff, the silent pertinacity of the gentle scholar who got his last hurt at Fair Oaks, the ardour in the charge of the gallant gentleman who, with the death-wound in his side, headed his brigade at Cedar Creek! How it all comes back, and they never come! I cannot again be the Vauban of fortresses in the innocent snow, but I shall never see children moulding their clumsy giants in it without longing to help. It was a pretty fancy of the young Vermont sculptor to make his first essay in this evanescent material. Was it a figure of Youth, I wonder? Would it not be well if all artists could begin in stuff as perishable, to melt away when the sun of prosperity began to shine, and leave nothing behind but the gain of practised hands? It is pleasant to fancy that Shakespeare served his apprentice-ship at this trade, and owed to it that most pathetic of despairing wishes,—

> "O, that I were a mockery-king of snow,
> Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
> To melt myself away in water-drops!"

I have spoken of the exquisite curves of snow surfaces. Not less rare are the tints of which they are capable—the faint blue of the hollows, for the shadows in snow are always blue, and the tender rose of higher points, as you stand with your back to the setting sun and look upward across the soft rondure of a hill-side. I have seen within a mile of home effects of colour as lovely as any iridescence of the Silberhorn after sundown. Charles II., who never said a foolish thing, gave the English climate the highest praise when he said that it allowed you more hours out of

doors than any other, and I think our winter may fairly make the same boast as compared with the rest of the year. Its still mornings, with the thermometer near zero, put a premium on walking. There is more sentiment in turf, perhaps, and it is more elastic to the foot; its silence, too, is well-nigh as congenial with meditation as that of fallen pine tassel; but for exhilaration there is nothing like a stiff snow-crust that creaks like a cricket at every step, and communicates its own sparkle to the senses. The air you drink is *frappé*, all its grosser particles precipitated, and the dregs of your blood with them. A purer current mounts to the brain, courses sparkling through it, and rinses it thoroughly of all dejected stuff. There is nothing left to breed an exhalation of ill-humour or despondency, They say that this rarefied atmosphere has lessened the capacity of our lungs. Be it so. Quart-pots are for muddier liquor than nectar. To me, the city in winter is infinitely dreary—the sharp street-corners have such a chill in them, and the snow so soon loses its maidenhood to become a mere drab—"doing shameful things," as Steele says of politicians, "without being ashamed." I pine for the Quaker purity of my country landscape. I am speaking, of course, of those winters that are not niggardly of snow, as ours too often are, giving us a gravelly dust instead. Nothing can be unsightlier that those piebald fields where the coarse brown hide of Earth shows through the holes of her ragged ermine. But even when there is abundance of snow, I find as I grow older that there are not so many good crusts as there used to be. When I first observed this, I rashly set it to the account of that general degeneracy in nature (keeping pace with the same melancholy phenomenon in man) which forces itself upon the attention and into the philosophy of middle life. But happening once to be weighed, it occurred to me that an arch which would bear fifty pounds could hardly be blamed for giving way under more than three times the weight. I have sometimes thought that if theologians would remember this in their arguments, and consider that the man may

slump through, with no fault of his own, where the boy would have skimmed the surface in safety, it would be better for all parties. However, when you *do* get a crust that will bear, and know any brooklet that runs down a hill-side, be sure to go and take a look at him, especially if your crust is due, as it commonly is, to a cold snap following eagerly on a thaw. You will never find him so cheerful. As he shrank away after the last thaw, he built for himself the most exquisite caverns of ice to run through, if not "measureless to man" like those of Alph, the sacred river, yet perhaps more pleasing for their narrowness than those for their grandeur. What a cunning silversmith is Frost! The rarest workmanship of Delhi or Genoa copies him but clumsily, as if the fingers of all other artists were thumbs. Fernwork and lacework and filagree in endless variety, and under it all the water tinkles like a distant guitar, or drums like a tambourine, or gurgles like the Tokay of an anchorite's dream. Beyond doubt there is a fairy procession marching along those frail arcades and translucent corridors.

> "Their oaten pipes blow wondrous shrill,
> The hemlock small blow clear."

And hark! is that the ringing of Titania's bridle, or the bells of the wee, wee hawk that sits on Oberon's wrist? This wonder of Frost's handiwork may be had every winter, but he can do better than this, though I have seen it but once in my life. There had been a thaw without wind or rain, making the air fat with grey vapour. Towards sundown came that chill, the avant-courier of a north-westerly gale. Then, though there was no perceptible current in the atmosphere, the fog began to attach itself in frosty roots and filaments to the southern side of every twig and grass-stem. The very posts had poems traced upon them by this dumb minstrel. Wherever the moist seeds found lodgment grew an inch-deep moss fine as cobweb, a slender coral-reef, argentine, delicate, as of some silent sea in the moon, such as Agassiz dredges when he dreams. The frost, too, can

wield a delicate graver, and in fancy leaves Piranesi far behind. He covers your window-pane with Alpine etchings, as if in memory of that sanctuary where he finds shelter even in midsummer.

Now look down from your hill-side across the valley. The trees are leafless, but this is the season to study their anatomy, and did you ever notice before how much colour there is in the twigs of many of them? And the smoke from those chimneys is so blue, it seems like a feeder of the sky into which it flows. Winter refines it, and gives it agreeable associations. In summer it suggests cookery or the drudgery of steam-engines, but now your fancy (if it can forget for a moment the dreary usurpation of stoves) traces it down to the fireside and the brightened faces of children. Thoreau is the only poet who has fitly sung it. The wood-cutter rises before day, and

> "First in the dusky dawn he sends abroad
> His early scout, his emissary, smoke,
> The earliest, latest pilgrim from his roof,
> To feel the frosty air; . . .
> And, while he crouches still beside the hearth,
> Nor musters courage to unbar the door,
> It has gone down the glen with the light wind
> And o'er the plain unfurled its venturous wreath,
> Draped the tree-tops, loitered upon the hill,
> And warmed the pinions of the early bird;
> And now, perchance, high in the crispy air,
> Has caught sight of the day o'er the earth's edge,
> And greets its master's eye at his low door
> As some refulgent cloud in the upper sky."

Here is very bad verse and very good imagination. He had been reading Wordsworth, or he would not have made *tree-tops* an iambus. In the *Moretum* of Virgil (or, if not his, better than most of his) is a pretty picture of a peasant kindling his winter-morning fire. He rises before dawn,

> "Sollicitaque manu tenebras explorat inertes
> Vestigatque focum læsus quem denique sensit.
> Parvulus exusto remanebat stipite fumus,
> Et cinis obductæ celabat lumina prunæ.
> Admovet his pronam submissa fronte lucernam,

Et producit acu stupas humore carentes,
Excitat et crebris languentem flatibus ignem ;
Tandem concepto tenebræ fulgore recedunt,
Oppositaque manu lumen defendit ab aura."

"With cautious hand he gropes the sluggish dark,
Tracking the hearth which, scorched, he feels erelong.
In burnt-out logs a slender smoke remained,
And raked-up ashes hid the cinders' eyes ;
Stooping, to these the lamp outstretched he nears,
And, with a needle loosening the dry wick,
With frequent breath excites the languid flame.
Before the gathering glow the shades recede,
And his bent hand the new-caught light defends."

Ovid heightens the picture by a single touch :—

"Ipse genu posito flammas exsuscitat aura."
"Kneeling, his breath calls back to life the flames."

If you walk down now into the woods, you may find a robin or a blue-bird among the red-cedars, or a nuthatch scaling deviously the trunk of some hardwood tree with an eye as keen as that of a French soldier foraging for the *pot-au-feu* of his mess. Perhaps a blue-jay shrills *cah cah* in his corvine trebles, or a chickadee

"Shows feats of his gymnastic play,
Head downward, clinging to the spray."

But both him and the snow-bird I love better to see, tiny fluffs of feathered life, as they scurry about in a driving mist of snow, than in this serene air.

Coleridge has put into verse one of the most beautiful phenomena of a winter walk :—

"The woodman winding westward up the glen
At wintry dawn, where o'er the sheep-track's maze
The viewless snow-mist weaves a glistening haze,
Sees full before him, gliding without tread,
An image with a halo round its head."

But this aureole is not peculiar to winter. I have noticed it often in a summer morning, when the grass was heavy with dew, and even later in the day, when the dewless grass was still fresh enough to have a gleam of its own.

For my own part I prefer a winter walk that takes in the nightfall and the intense silence that ereiong follows it. The evening lamps look yellower by contrast with the snow, and give the windows that hearty look of which our secretive fires have almost robbed them. The stars seem

> "To hang, like twinkling winter lamps,
> Among the branches of the leafless trees,"

or, if you are on a hill-top (whence it is sweet to watch the home-lights gleam out one by one), they look nearer than in summer, and appear to take a conscious part in the cold. Especially in one of those stand-stills of the air that forebode a change of weather, the sky is dusted with motes of fire of which the summer-watcher never dreamed. Winter, too, is, on the whole, the triumphant season of the moon, a moon devoid of sentiment, if you choose, but with the refreshment of a purer intellectual light—the cooler orb of middle life. Who ever saw anything to match that gleam, rather divined than seen, which runs before her over the snow, a breath of light, as she rises on the infinite silence of winter night? High in the heavens also she seems to bring out some intenser property of cold with her chilly polish. The poets have instinctively noted this. When Goody Blake imprecates a curse of perpetual chill upon Harry Gill, she has

> "The cold, cold moon above her head;"

and Coleridge speaks of

> "The silent icicles,
> Quietly gleaming to the quiet moon"

As you walk homeward,—for it is time that we should end our ramble,—you may perchance hear the most impressive sound in nature, unless it be the fall of a tree in the forest during the hush of summer noon. It is the stifled shriek of the lake yonder as the frost throttles it. Wordsworth has described it (too much, I fear, in the style of Dr. Armstrong):—

> "And, interrupting oft that eager game,
> From under Esthwaite's splitting fields of ice,

> The pent-up air, struggling to free itself,
> Gave out to meadow-grounds and hills a loud
> Protracted yelling, like the noise of wolves
> Howling in troops along the Bothnic main."

Thoreau (unless the English lakes have a different dialect from ours) calls it admirably well a "whoop." But it is a noise like none other, as if Demogorgon were moaning inarticulately from under the earth. Let us get within doors, lest we hear it again, for there is something bodeful and uncanny in it.

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## *ON A CERTAIN CONDESCENSION IN FOREIGNERS.*

Walking one day toward the Village, as we used to call it in the good old days when almost every dweller in the town had been born in it, I was enjoying that delicious sense of disenthralment from the actual which the deepening twilight brings with it, giving, as it does, a sort of obscure novelty to things familiar. The coolness, the hush, broken only by the distant bleat of some belated goat, querulous to be disburthened of her milky load, the few faint stars, more guessed as yet than seen; the sense that the coming dark would so soon fold me in the secure privacy of its disguise—all things combined in a result as near absolute peace as can be hoped for by a man who knows that there is a writ out against him in the hands of the printer's devil. For the moment I was enjoying the blessed privilege of thinking without being called on to stand and deliver what I thought to the small public who are good enough to take any interest therein. I love old ways, and the path I was walking felt kindly to the feet it had known for almost fifty years. How many fleeting impressions it had shared with me! How many times I had lingered to study the shadows of the leaves mezzotinted upon the turf that edged it by the moon, of

the bare boughs etched with a touch beyond Rembrandt by the same unconscious artist on the smooth page of snow! If I turned round, through dusky tree-gaps came the first twinkle of evening lamps in the dear old homestead. On Corey's hill I could see these tiny pharoses of love and home and sweet domestic thoughts flash out one by one across the blackening salt-meadow between. How much has not kerosene added to the cheerfulness of our evening landscape! A pair of night-herons flapped heavily over me toward the hidden river. The war was ended. I might walk townward without that aching dread of bulletins that had darkened the July sunshine, and twice made the scarlet leaves of October seemed stained with blood. I remembered with a pang, half proud, half painful, how so many years ago I had walked over the same path and felt round my finger the soft pressure of a little hand that was one day to harden with faithful grip of sabre. On how many paths, leading to how many homes where proud Memory does all she can to fill up the fireside gaps with shining shapes, must not men be walking in just such pensive mood as I? Ah, young heroes, safe in immortal youth as those of Homer, you at least carried your ideal hence untarnished! It is locked for you beyond moth or rust in the treasure-chamber of Death.

Is not a country, I thought, that has had such as they in it, that could give such as they a brave joy in dying for it, worth something, then? And as I felt more and more the soothing magic of evening's cool palm upon my temples, as my fancy came home from its reverie, and my senses, with reawakened curiosity, ran to the front windows again from the viewless closet of abstraction, and felt a strange charm in finding the old tree and shabby fence still there under the travesty of falling night, nay, were conscious of an unsuspected newness in familiar stars and the fading outlines of hills my earliest horizon, I was conscious of an immortal soul, and could not but rejoice in the unwaning goodliness of the world into which I had been born without

any merit of my own. I thought of dear Henry Vaughan's rainbow, "Still young and fine!" I remembered people who had to go over to the Alps to learn what the divine silence of snow was, who must run to Italy before they were conscious of the miracle wrought every day under their very noses by the sunset; who must call upon the Berkshire hills to teach them what a painter autumn was, while close at hand the Fresh Pond meadows made all oriels cheap with hues that showed as if a sunset cloud had been wrecked among their maples. One might be worse off than even in America, I thought. There are some things so elastic that even the heavy roller of democracy cannot flatten them altogether down. The mind can weave itself warmly in the cocoon of its own thoughts and dwell a hermit anywhere. A country without traditions, without ennobling associations, a scramble of *parvenus*, with a consciousness of shoddy running through politics, manners, art, literature, nay, religion itself? I confess it did not seem so to me there in that illimitable quiet, that serene self-possession of nature, where Collins might have brooded his "Ode to Evening," or where those verses on Solitude in Dodsley's Collection, that Hawthorne liked so much, might have been composed. Traditions? Granting that we had none, all that is worth having in them is the common property of the soul—an estate in gavel-kind for all the sons of Adam—and, moreover, if a man cannot stand on his two feet (the prime quality of whoever has left any tradition behind him), were it not better for him to be honest about it at once, and go down on all-fours? And for associations, if one have not the wit to make them for himself out of his native earth, no ready-made ones of other men will avail him much. Lexington is none the worse to me for not being in Greece, nor Gettsyburg that its name is not Marathon. "Blessed old fields," I was just exclaiming to myself, like one of Mrs. Radcliffe's heroes, "dear acres, innocently secure from history, which these eyes first beheld, may you be also those to which they shall at last slowly darken!" when I was interrupted by a voice which

asked me in German whether I was the Herr Professor, Doctor, So and-So? The "Doctor" was by brevet or vaticination, to make the grade easier to my pocket.

One feels so intimately assured that he is made up, in part, of shreds and leavings of the past, in part of the interpolations of other people, that an honest man would be slow in saying *yes* to such a question. But "my name is So-and-So" is a safe answer, and I gave it. While I had been romancing with myself, the street lamps had been lighted, and it was under one of these detectives that have robbed the Old Road of its privilege of sanctuary after nightfall that I was ambushed by my foe. The inexorable villain had taken my description, it appears, that I might have the less chance to escape him. Dr. Holmes tells us that we change our substance, not every seven years, as was once believed, but with every breath we draw. Why had I not the wit to avail myself of the subterfuge, and, like Peter, to renounce my identity, especially as, in certain moods of mind, I have often more than doubted of it myself? When a man is, as it were, his own front door, and is thus knocked at, why may he not assume the right of that sacred wood to make every house a castle, by denying himself to all visitations? I was truly not at home when the question was put to me, but had to recall myself from all out-of-doors, and so piece my self-consciousness hastily together as well as I could before I answered it.

I knew perfectly well what was coming. It is seldom that debtors or good Samaritans waylay people under gas lamps in order to force money upon them, so far as I have seen or heard. I was also aware, from considerable experience, that every foreigner is persuaded that, by doing this country the favour of coming to it, he has laid every native thereof under an obligation, pecuniary or other, as the case may be, whose discharge he is entitled to on demand duly made in person or by letter. Too much learning (of this kind) had made me mad in the provincial sense of the word. I had begun life with the theory of giving something to every

beggar that came along, though sure of never finding a native-born countryman among them. In a small way, I was resolved to emulate Hatem Tai's tent, with its three hundred and sixty-five entrances, one for every day in the year—I know not whether he was astronomer enough to add another for leap-years. The beggars were a kind of German silver aristocracy; not real plate, to be sure, but better than nothing. Where everybody was overworked, they supplied the comfortable equipoise of absolute leisure, so æsthetically needful. Besides, I was but too conscious of a vagrant fibre in myself, which too often thrilled me in my solitary walks with the temptation to wander on into infinite space, and by a single spasm of resolution to emancipate myself from the drudgery of prosaic serfdom to respectability and the regular course of things. This prompting has been at times my familiar demon, and I could not but feel a kind of respectful sympathy for men who had dared what I had only sketched out to myself as a splendid possibility. For seven years I helped maintain one heroic man on an imaginary journey to Portland—as fine an example as I have ever known of hopeless loyalty to an ideal. I assisted another so long in a fruitless attempt to reach Mecklenburg-Schwerin, that at last we grinned in each other's faces when we met, like a couple of augurs. He was possessed by this harmless mania as some are by the North Pole, and I shall never forget his look of regretful compassion (as for one who was sacrificing his higher life to the flesh-pots of Egypt) when I at last advised him somewhat strenuously to go to the D——, whither the road was so much travelled that he could not miss it. General Banks, in his noble zeal for the honour of his country, would confer on the Secretary of State the power of imprisoning, in case of war, all these seekers of the unattainable, thus by a stroke of the pen annihilating the single poetic element in our humdrum life. Alas! not everybody has the genius to be a Bobbin-Boy, or doubtless all these also would have chosen that more prosperous line of life! But moralists, sociologists, political economists, and taxes have slowly

convinced me that my beggarly sympathies were a sin against society. Especially was the Buckle doctrine of averages (so flattering to our free-will) persuasive with me; for as there must be in every year a certain number who would bestow an alms on these abridged editions of the Wandering Jew, the withdrawal of my quota could make no possible difference, since some destined proxy must always step forward to fill my gap. Just so many misdirected letters every year, and no more. Would it were as easy to reckon up the number of men on whose backs fate has written the wrong address, so that they arrive by mistake in Congress and other places where they do not belong! May not these wanderers of whom I speak have been sent into the world without any proper address at all? Where is our Dead-Letter Office for such? And if wiser social arrangements should furnish us with something of the sort, fancy (horrible thought!) how many a working man's friend (a kind of industry in which the labour is light and the wages heavy) would be sent thither because not called for in the office where he at present lies!

But I am leaving my new acquaintance too long under the lamp-post. The same Gano which had betrayed me to him revealed to me a well-set young man of about half my own age, as well dressed, so far as I could see, as I was, and with every natural qualification for getting his own livelihood, as good, if not better, than my own. He had been reduced to the painful necessity of calling upon me by a series of crosses beginning with the Baden Revolution (for which, I own, he seemed rather young—but perhaps he referred to a kind of revolution practised every season at Baden-Baden), continued by repeated failures in business, for amounts which must convince me of his entire respectability, and ending with our Civil War. During the latter he had served with distinction as a soldier, taking a main part in every important battle, with a rapid list of which he favoured me, and no doubt would have admitted that, impartial as Jonathan Wild's great ancestor, he had been on both sides, had I baited him with a few hints of

conservative opinions on a subject so distressing to a gentleman wishing to profit by one's sympathy, and unhappily doubtful as to which way it might lean. For all these reasons, and, as he seemed to imply, for his merit in consenting to be born in Germany, he considered himself my natural creditor to the extent of five dollars, which he would handsomely consent to accept in greenbacks, though he preferred specie. The offer was certainly a generous one, and the claim presented with an assurance that carried conviction. But, unhappily, I had been led to remark a curious natural phenomenon. If I was ever weak enough to give anything to a petitioner of whatever nationality, it always rained decayed compatriots of his for a month after. *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* may not be always safe logic, but here I seemed to perceive a natural connection of cause and effect. Now, a few days before I had been so tickled with a paper (professedly written by a benevolent American clergyman) certifying that the bearer, a hard-working German, had long "sofered with rheumatic paints in his limps," that, after copying the passage into my note-book, I thought it but fair to pay a trifling *honorarium* to the author. I had pulled the string of the shower-bath! It had been running shipwrecked sailors for some time, but forthwith it began to pour Teutons, redolent of *lager-bier*. I could not help associating the apparition of my new friend with this series of otherwise unaccountable phenomena. I accordingly made up my mind to deny the debt, and modestly did so, pleading a native bias towards impecuniosity to the full as strong as his own. He took a high tone with me at once, such as an honest man would naturally take with a confessed repudiator. He even brought down his proud stomach so far as to join himself to me for the rest of my townward walk, that he might give me his views of the American people, and thus inclusively of myself.

I know not whether it is because I am pigeon-livered and lack gall, or whether it is from an overmastering sense of drollery, but I am apt to submit to such bastings

with a patience which afterwards surprises me, being not without my share of warmth in the blood. Perhaps it is because I so often meet with young persons who know vastly more than I do, and especially with so many foreigners whose knowledge of this country is superior to my own. However it may be, I listened for some time with tolerable composure as my self-appointed lecturer gave me in detail his opinions of my country and its people. America, he informed me, was without arts, science, literature, culture, or any native hope of supplying them. We were a people wholly given to money-getting, and who, having got it, knew no other use for it than to hold it fast. I am fain to confess that I felt a sensible itching of the biceps, and that my fingers closed with such a grip as he had just informed me was one of the effects of our unhappy climate. But happening just then to be where I could avoid temptation by dodging down a bye-street, I hastily left him to finish his diatribe to the lamp-post, which could stand it better than I. That young man will never know how near he came to being assaulted by a respectable gentleman of middle age, at the corner of Church Street. I have never felt quite satisfied that I did all my duty by him in not knocking him down. But perhaps he might have knocked *me* down, and then?

The capacity of indignation makes an essential part of the outfit of every honest man, but I am inclined to doubt whether he is a wise one who allows himself to act upon its first hints. It should be rather, I suspect, a *latent* heat in the blood, which makes itself felt in character, a steady reserve for the brain, warming the ovum of thought to life, rather than cooking it by a too hasty enthusiasm in reaching the boiling-point. As my pulse gradually fell back to its normal beat, I reflected that I had been uncomfortably near making a fool of myself—a handy salve of euphuism for our vanity, though it does not always make a just allowance to Nature for her share in the business. What possible claim had my Teutonic friend to rob me of my composure? I am not, I think, specially thin-skinned

as to other people's opinions of myself, having, as I conceive, later and fuller intelligence on that point than anybody else can give me. Life is continually weighing us in very sensitive scales, and telling every one of us precisely what his real weight is to the last grain of dust. Whoever at fifty does not rate himself quite as low as most of his acquaintance would be likely to put him, must be either a fool or a great man, and I humbly disclaim being either. But if I was not smarting in person from any scattering shot of my late companion's commination, why should I grow hot at any implication of my country therein? Surely *her* shoulders are broad enough, if yours or mine are not, to bear up under a considerable avalanche of this kind. It is the bit of truth in every slander, the hint of likeness in every caricature, that makes us smart. "Art thou *there*, old Truepenny?" How did your blade know its way so well to that one loose rivet in our armour? I wondered whether Americans were over sensitive in this respect, whether they were more touchy than other folks. On the whole, I thought we were not. Plutarch, who at least had studied philosophy, if he had not mastered it, could not stomach something Herodotus had said of Bœotia, and devoted an essay to showing up the delightful old traveller's malice and ill-breeding. French editors leave out of Montaigne's "Travels" some remarks of his about France, for reasons best known to themselves. Pachydermatous Deutschland, covered with trophies from every field of letters, still winces under that question which Père Bouhours put two centuries ago, *Si un Allemand peut être bel-esprit?* John Bull grew apoplectic with angry amazement at the audacious persiflage of Pückler-Muskau. To be sure, he was a prince—but that was not all of it, for a chance phrase of gentle Hawthorne sent a spasm through all the journals of England. Then this tenderness is not peculiar to *us?* Console yourself, dear man and brother; whatever you may be sure of, be sure at least of this, that you are dreadfully like other people. Human nature has a much greater genius for sameness than for originality,

or the world would be at a sad pass shortly. The surprising thing is that men have such a taste for this somewhat musty flavour, that an Englishman, for example, should feel himself defrauded, nay, even outraged, when he comes over here and finds a people speaking what he admits to be something like English, and yet so very different from (or, as he would say, to) those he left at home. Nothing, I am sure, equals *my* thankfulness when I meet an Englishman who is *not* like every other, or, I may add, an American of the same odd turn.

Certainly it is no shame to a man that he should be as nice about his country as about his sweetheart, and who ever heard even the friendliest appreciation of that unexpressive she that did not seem to fall infinitely short? Yet it would hardly be wise to hold every one an enemy who could not see her with our own enchanted eyes. It seems to be the common opinion of foreigners that Americans are *too* tender upon this point. Perhaps we are; and if so, there must be a reason for it. Have we had fair play? Could the eyes of what is called Good Society (though it is so seldom true either to the adjective or noun) look upon a nation of democrats with any chance of receiving an undistorted image? Were not those, moreover, who found in the old order of things an earthly paradise, paying them quarterly dividends for the wisdom of their ancestors, with the punctuality of the seasons, unconsciously bribed to misunderstand if not to misrepresent us? Whether at war or at peace, there we were, a standing menace to all earthly paradises of that kind, fatal underminers of the very credit on which the dividends were based, all the more hateful and terrible that our destructive agency was so insidious, working invisible in the elements, as it seemed, active while they slept, and coming upon them in the darkness like an armed man. *Could* Laius have the proper feelings of a father towards Œdipus, announced as his destined destroyer by infallible oracles, and felt to be such by every conscious fibre of his soul? For more than a century the Dutch were the laughing-stock of polite Europe. They were butter-

firkins, swillers of beer and schnaps, and their *vrouws*, from whom Holbein painted the all-but loveliest of Madonnas, Rembrandt the graceful girl who sits immortal on his knee in Dresden, and Rubens his abounding goddesses, were the synonymes of clumsy vulgarity. Even so late as Irving the ships of the greatest navigators in the world were represented as sailing equally well stern-foremost. That the aristocratic Venetians should have

> "Riveted with gigantic piles
> Thorough the centre their new-catchëd miles,"

was heroic. But the far more marvellous achievement of the Dutch in the same kind was ludicrous even to republican Marvell. Meanwhile, during that very century of scorn, they were the best artists, sailors, merchants, bankers, printers, scholars, jurisconsults, and statesmen in Europe, and the genius of Motley has revealed them to us, earning a right to themselves by the most heroic struggle in human annals. But, alas! they were not merely simple burghers who had fairly made themselves high mightinesses, and could treat on equal terms with anointed kings, but their commonwealth carried in its bosom the germs of democracy. They even unmuzzled, at least after dark, that dreadful mastiff, the Press, whose scent is, or ought to be, so keen for wolves in sheep's clothing and for certain other animals in lions' skins. They made fun of sacred majesty, and, what was worse, managed uncommonly well without it. In an age when periwigs made so large a part of the natural dignity of man, people with such a turn of mind were dangerous. How could they seem other than vulgar and hateful?

In the natural course of things we succeeded to this unenviable position of general butt. The Dutch had thriven under it pretty well, and there was hope that we could at least contrive to worry along. And we certainly did in a very redoubtable fashion. Perhaps we deserved some of the sarcasm more than our Dutch predecessors in office. We had nothing to boast of in arts or letters, and were

given to bragging overmuch of our merely material prosperity, due quite as much to the virtue of our continent as to our own. There was some truth in Carlyle's sneer after all. Till we had succeeded in some higher way than this, we had only the success of physical growth. Our greatness, like that of enormous Russia, was greatness on the map—barbarian mass only; but had we gone down, like that other Atlantis, in some vast cataclysm, we should have covered but a pin's point on the chart of memory, compared with those ideal spaces occupied by tiny Attica and cramped England. At the same time, our critics somewhat too easily forgot that material must make ready the foundation for real triumphs, that the arts have no chance in poor countries. But it must be allowed that democracy stood for a great deal in our shortcoming. The *Edinburgh Review* never would have thought of asking, "Who reads a Russian book?" and England was satisfied with iron from Sweden without being impertinently inquisitive after her painters and statuaries. Was it that they expected too much from the mere miracle of Freedom? Is it not the highest art of a Republic to make men of flesh and blood, and not to make marble ideals of such? It may be fairly doubted whether we have produced this higher type of man yet. Perhaps it is the collective, not the individual, humanity that is to have a chance of nobler development among us. We shall see. We have a vast amount of imported ignorance, and still worse, of native ready-made knowledge, to digest before even the preliminaries of such a consummation can be arranged. We have got to learn that statesmanship is the most complicated of all arts, and to come back to the apprenticeship-system too hastily abandoned. At present, we trust a man with making constitutions on less proof of competence than we should demand before we gave him our shoe to patch. We have nearly reached the limit of the reaction from the old notion, which paid too much regard to birth and station as qualifications for office, and have touched the extreme point in the opposite direction, putting the highest of

human functions up at auction to be bid for by any creature capable of going upright on two legs. In some places, we have arrived at a point at which civil society is no longer possible, and already another reaction has begun, not backwards to the old system, but towards fitness either from natural aptitude or special training. But will it always be safe to let evils work their own cure by becoming unendurable? Every one of them leaves its taint in the constitution of the body-politic, each in itself, perhaps, trifling, yet altogether powerful for evil.

But whatever we might do or leave undone, we were not genteel, and it was uncomfortable to be continually reminded that, though we should boast that we were the Great West till we were black in the face, it did not bring us an inch nearer to the world's West-End. That sacred enclosure of respectability was tabooed to us. The Holy Alliance did not inscribe us on its visiting-list. The Old World of wigs and orders and liveries would shop with us, but we must ring at the area-bell, and not venture to awaken the most august clamours of the knocker. Our manners, it must be granted, had none of those graces that stamp the caste of Vere de Vere, in whatever museum of British antiquities they may be hidden. In short, we were vulgar.

This was one of those horribly vague accusations, the victim of which has no defence. An umbrella is of no avail against a Scotch mist. It envelops you, it penetrates at every pore, it wets you through without seeming to wet you at all. Vulgarity is an eighth deadly sin, added to the list in these latter days, and worse than all the others put together, since it perils your salvation in *this* world, far the more important of the two in the minds of most men. It profits nothing to draw nice distinctions between essential and conventional, for the convention in this case *is* the essence, and you may break every command in the decalogue with perfect good-breeding, nay, if you are not adroit, without losing caste. We, indeed, had it not to lose, for we had never gained it. "*How* am I vulgar?" asks

the culprit, shudderingly. "Because thou art not like unto Us," answers Lucifer, Son of the Morning, and there is no more to be said. The god of this world may be a fallen angel, but he has us *there!* We were as clean, so far as my observation goes, I think we were cleaner, morally and physically, than the English, and therefore, of course, than anybody else. But we did not pronounce the diphthong *ou* as they did, and we said *eether* and not *eyther*, following therein the fashion of our ancestors, who unhappily could bring over no English better than Shakespeare's; and we did not stammer as they had learned to do from the courtiers, who in this way flattered the Hanoverian king, a foreigner among the people he had come to reign over. Worse than all, we might have the noblest ideas and the finest sentiments in the world, but we vented them through that organ by which men are led rather than leaders, though some physiologists would persuade us that Nature furnishes her captains with a fine handle to their faces that Opportunity may get a good purchase on them for dragging them to the front.

This state of things was so painful that excellent people were not wanting who gave their whole genius to reproducing here the original Bull, whether by gaiters, the cut of their whiskers, by a factitious brutality in their tone, or by an accent that was for ever tripping and falling flat over the tangled roots of our common tongue. Martyrs to a false ideal, it never occurred to them that nothing is more hateful to gods and men than a second-rate Englishman, and for the very reason that this planet never produced a more splendid creature than the first-rate one, witness Shakespeare and the Indian Mutiny. Witness that truly sublime self-abnegation of those prisoners lately among the bandits of Greece, where average men gave an example of quiet fortitude for which all the stoicism of antiquity can show no match. If we could contrive to be not too unobtrusively our simple selves, we should be the most delightful of human beings, and the most original; whereas, when the plating of Anglicism rubs off, as it always will in points

that come to much wear, we are liable to very unpleasing conjectures about the quality of the metal underneath. Perhaps one reason why the average Briton spreads himself here with such an easy air of superiority may be owing to the fact that he meets with so many bad imitations as to conclude himself the only real thing in a wilderness of shams. He fancies himself moving through an endless Bloomsbury, where his mere apparition confers honour as an avatar of the court-end of the universe. Not a Bull of them all but is persuaded he bears Europa upon his back. This is the sort of fellow whose patronage is so divertingly insufferable. Thank heaven, he is not the only specimen of cater-cousinship from the dear old mother island that is shown to us! Among genuine things, I know nothing more genuine than the better men whose limbs were made in England. So manly-tender, so brave, so true, so warranted to wear, they make us proud to feel that blood is thicker than water.

But it is not merely the Englishman; every European candidly admits in himself some right of primogeniture in respect to us, and pats this shaggy continent on the back with a lively sense of generous unbending. The German who plays the bass-viol has a well-founded contempt, which he is not always nice in concealing, for a country so few of whose children ever take that noble instrument between their knees. His cousin, the Ph.D. from Göttingen, cannot help despising a people who do not grow loud and red over Aryans and Turanians, and are indifferent about their descent from either. The Frenchman feels an easy mastery in speaking his mother tongue, and attributes it to some native superiority of parts that lifts him high above us barbarians of the West. The Italian *prima donna* sweeps a courtesy of careless pity to the over-facile pit which unsexes her with the *bravo!* innocently meant to show a familiarity with foreign usage. But all without exception make no secret of regarding us as the goose bound to deliver them a golden egg in return for *their* cackle. Such men as Agassiz, Guyot, and Goldwin Smith come with gifts in their hands;

but since it is commonly European failures who bring hither their remarkable gifts and acquirements, this view of the case is sometimes just the least bit in the world provoking. To think what a delicious seclusion of contempt we enjoyed till California and our own ostentatious *parvenus*, flinging gold away in Europe that might have endowed libraries at home, gave us the ill repute of riches! What a shabby downfall from the Arcadia which the French officers of our Revolutionary War fancied they saw here through Rousseau-tinted spectacles! Something of Arcadia there really was, something of the Old Age; and that divine provincialism were cheaply repurchased could we have it back again in exchange for the tawdry upholstery that has taken its place.

For some reason or other, the European has rarely been able to see America except in caricature. Would the first Review of the world have printed the *niaiseries* of Mr. Maurice Sand as a picture of society in any civilised country? Mr. Sand, to be sure, has inherited nothing of his famous mother's literary outfit, except the pseudonyme. But since the conductors of the *Revue* could not have published his story because it was clever, they must have thought it valuable for its truth. As true as the last century Englishman's picture of Jean Crapaud! We do not ask to be sprinkled with rose-water, but may perhaps fairly protest against being drenched with the rinsings of an unclean imagination. The next time the *Revue* allows such ill-bred persons to throw their slops out of its first-floor windows, let it honestly preface the discharge with a *gare de l'eau!* that we may run from under in season. And Mr. Duvergier d'Hauranne, who knows how to be entertaining! I know *le Français est plutôt indiscret que confiant*, and the pen slides too easily when indiscretions will fetch so much a page; but should we not have been *tant-soit-peu* more cautious had we been writing about people on the other side of the Channel? But then it is a fact in the natural history of the American long familiar to Europeans, that he abhors privacy, knows not the meaning of reserve,

lives in hotels because of their greater publicity, and is never so pleased as when his domestic affairs (if he may be said to have any) are paraded in the newspapers. Barnum, it is well known, represents perfectly the average national sentiment in this respect. However it be, we are not treated like other people, or perhaps I should say like people who are ever likely to be met with in society.

Is it in the climate? Either I have a false notion of European manners, or else the atmosphere affects them strangely when exported hither. Perhaps they suffer from the sea-voyage like some of the more delicate wines. During our Civil War an English gentleman of the highest description was kind enough to call upon me, mainly, as it seemed, to inform me how entirely he sympathised with the Confederates, and how sure he felt that we could never subdue them,—"they were the *gentlemen* of the country, you know." Another, the first greetings hardly over, asked me how I accounted for the universal meagreness of my countrymen. To a thinner man than I, or from a stouter man than he, the question *might* have been offensive. The Marquis of Hartington* wore a secession badge at a public ball in New York. In a civilised country, he might have been roughly handled; but here, where the *bienséances* are not so well understood, of course nobody minded it. A French traveller told me he had been a good deal in the British colonies, and had been astonished to see how soon the people became Americanised. He added, with delightful *bonhomie*, and as if he were sure it would charm me, that "they even began to talk through their noses, just like you!" I was naturally ravished with this testimony to the assimilating power of democracy, and could only reply that I hoped they would never adopt our

* One of Mr. Lincoln's neatest strokes of humour was his treatment of this gentleman when a laudable curiosity induced him to be presented to the President of the Broken Bubble. Mr. Lincoln persisted in calling him Mr. Partington. Surely the refinement of good-breeding could go no further. Giving the young man his real name (already notorious in the newspapers) would have made his visit an insult. Had Henri IV. done this, it would have been famous.

democratic patent-method of seeming to settle one's honest debts, for they would find it paying through the nose in the long run. I am a man of the New World, and do not know precisely the present fashion of May Fair, but I have a kind of feeling that if an American (*mutato nomine, de te* is always frightfully possible) were to do this kind of thing under a European roof, it would induce some disagreeable reflections as to the ethical results of democracy. I read the other day in print the remark of a British tourist who had eaten large quantities of our salt, such as it is (I grant it has not the European savour), that the Americans were hospitable, no doubt, but that it was partly because they longed for foreign visitors to relieve the tedium of their dead-level existence, and partly from ostentation. What shall we do? Shall we close our doors? Not I, for one, if I should so have forfeited the friendship of L. S., most lovable of men. He somehow seems to find us human at least, and so did Clough, whose poetry will one of these days, perhaps, be found to have been the best utterance in verse of this generation. And T. H., the mere grasp of whose manly hand carries with it the pledge of frankness and friendship, of an abiding simplicity of nature as affecting as it is rare!

The fine old Tory aversion of former times was not hard to bear. There was something even refreshing in it, as in a north-easter to a hardy temperament. When a British parson, travelling in Newfoundland while the slash of our separation was still raw, after prophesying a glorious future for an island that continued to dry its fish under the ægis of Saint George, glances disdainfully over his spectacles in parting at the U. S. A., and forebodes for them a "speedy relapse into barbarism," now that they have madly cut themselves off from the humanising influences of Britain, I smile with barbarian self-conceit. But this kind of thing became by degrees an unpleasant anachronism. For meanwhile the young giant was growing, was beginning indeed to feel tight in his clothes, was obliged to let in a gore here and there in Texas, in California, in New Mexico, in

Alaska, and had the scissors and needle and thread ready for Canada when the time came. His shadow loomed like a broken-spectre over against Europe,—the shadow of what they were coming to, that was the unpleasant part of it. Even in such misty image as they had of him, it was painfully evident that his clothes were not of any cut hitherto fashionable, nor conceivable by a Bond Street tailor; and this in an age, too, when everything depends upon clothes; when, if we do not keep up appearances, the seeming solid-frame of this universe, nay, your very God, would slump into himself, like a mockery king of snow, being nothing, after all, but a prevailing mode. From this moment the young giant assumed the respectable aspect of a phenomenon, to be got rid of if possible, but at any rate as legitimate a subject of human study as the glacial period or the silurian what-d'ye-call-ems. If the man of the primeval drift-heaps is so absorbingly interesting, why not the man of the drift that is just beginning, of the drift into whose irresistible current we are just being sucked whether we will or no? If I were in their place, I confess I should not be frightened. Man has survived so much, and contrived to be comfortable on this planet after surviving so much! I am something of a Protestant in matters of government also, and am willing to get rid of vestments and ceremonies and to come down to bare benches, if only faith in God take the place of a general agreement to profess confidence in ritual and sham. Every mortal man of us holds stock in the only public debt that is absolutely sure of payment, and that is the debt of the Maker of this Universe to the Universe he has made. I have no notion of selling out my stock in a panic.

It was something to have advanced even to the dignity of a phenomenon, and yet I do not know that the relation of the individual American to the individual European was bettered by it; and that, after all, must adjust itself comfortably before there can be a right understanding between the two. We had been a desert, we became a museum. People came hither for scientific and not social ends. The

very cockney could not complete his education without taking a vacant stare at us in passing. But the sociologists (I think they call themselves so) were the hardest to bear. There was no escape. I have even known a professor of this fearful science to come disguised in petticoats. We were cross-examined as a chemist cross-examines a new substance. Human! yes, all the elements are present, though abnormally combined. Civilised? Hm! that needs a stricter assay. No entomologist could take a more friendly interest in a strange bug. After a few such experiences, I, for one, have felt as if I were merely one of those horrid things preserved in spirits (and very bad spirits, too) in a cabinet. I was not the fellow-being of these explorers; I was a curiosity; I was a *specimen.* Hath not an American organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions even as a European hath? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? I will not keep on with Shylock to his next question but one.

Till after our Civil War it never seemed to enter the head of any foreigner, especially of any Englishman, that an American had what could be called a country, except as a place to eat, sleep, and trade in. Then it seemed to strike them suddenly. "By Jove, you know, fellahs don't fight like that for a shop-till!" No, I rather think not. To Americans America is something more than a promise and an expectation. It has a past and traditions of its own. A descent from men who sacrificed everything and came hither, not to better their fortunes, but to plant their idea in virgin soil, should be a good pedigree. There was never colony save this that went forth, not to seek gold, but God. Is it not as well to have sprung from such as these as from some burly beggar who came over with Wilhelmus Conquestor, unless, indeed, a line grow better as it runs farther away from stalwart ancestors? And for history, it is dry enough, no doubt, in the books, but, for all that, is of a kind that tells in the blood. I have admitted that Carlyle's sneer had a show of truth in it. But what does he himself, like a true Scot, admire in the

Hohenzollerns? First of all, that they were *canny*, a thrifty, forehanded race. Next, that they made a good fight from generation to generation with the chaos around them. That is precisely the battle which the English race on this continent has been carrying doughtily on for two centuries and a-half. Doughtily and silently, for you cannot hear in Europe "that crash, the death-song of the perfect tree," that has been going on here from sturdy father to sturdy son, and making this continent habitable for the weaker Old World breed that has swarmed to it during the last half-century. If ever men did a good stroke of work on this planet, it was the forefathers of those whom you are wondering whether it would not be prudent to acknowledge as far-off cousins. Alas! man of genius, to whom we owe so much, could you see nothing more than the burning of a foul chimney in that clash of Michael and Satan which flamed up under your very eyes?

Before our war we were to Europe but a huge mob of adventurers and shopkeepers. Leigh Hunt expressed it well enough when he said that he could never think of America without seeing a gigantic counter stretched all along the seaboard. Feudalism had by degrees made commerce, the great civiliser, contemptible. But a tradesman with sword on thigh and very prompt of stroke was not only redoubtable, he had become respectable also. Few people, I suspect, alluded twice to a needle in Sir John Hawkwood's presence, after that doughty fighter had exchanged it for a more dangerous tool of the same metal. Democracy had been hitherto only a ludicrous effort to reverse the laws of nature by thrusting Cleon into the place of Pericles. But a democracy that could fight for an abstraction, whose members held life and goods cheap compared with the larger life which we call country, was not merely unheard-of, but portentous. It was the nightmare of the Old World taking upon itself flesh and blood, turning out to be substance and not dream. Since the Norman crusader clanged down upon the throne of the *porphyro-geniti*, carefully-draped appearances had never

received such a shock, had never been so rudely called on to produce their titles to the empire of the world. Authority has had its periods not unlike those of geology, and at last comes Man claiming kingship in right of his mere manhood. The world of the Saurians might be in some respects more picturesque, but the march of events is inexorable, and it is bygone.

The young giant had certainly got out of long-clothes. He had become the *enfant terrible* of the human household. It was not and will not be easy for the world (especially for our British cousins) to look upon us as grown up. The youngest of nations, its people must also be young and to to be treated accordingly, was the syllogism—as if libraries did not make all nations equally old in all those respects, at least, where age is an advantage and not a defect. Youth, no doubt, has its good qualities, as people feel who are losing it; but boyishness is another thing. We had been somewhat boyish as a nation, a little loud, a little pushing, a little braggart. But might it not partly have been because we felt that we had certain claims to respect that were not admitted? The war which established our position as a vigorous nationality has also sobered us. A nation, like a man, cannot look death in the eyes for four years, without some strange reflections, without arriving at some clearer consciousness of the stuff it is made of, without some great moral change. Such a change, or the beginning of it, no observant person can fail to see here. Our thought and our politics, our bearing as a people, are assuming a manlier tone. We have been compelled to see what was weak in democracy as well as what was strong. We have begun obscurely to recognise that things do not go of themselves, and that popular government is not in itself a panacea, is no better than any other form except as the virtue and wisdom of the people make it so, and that when men undertake to do their own kingship, they enter upon the dangers and responsibilities as well as the privileges of the function. Above all, it looks as if we were on the way to be persuaded that no government can

be carried on by declamation. It is noticeable also that facility of communication has made the best English and French thought far more directly operative here than ever before. Without being Europeanised, our discussion of important questions in statesmanship, political economy, in æsthetics, is taking a broader scope and a higher tone. It had certainly been provincial, one might almost say local, to a very unpleasant extent. Perhaps our experience in soldiership has taught us to value training more than we have been popularly wont. We may possibly come to the conclusion, one of these days, that self-made men may not be always equally skilful in the manufacture of wisdom, may not be divinely commissioned to fabricate the higher qualities of opinion on all possible topics of human interest.

So long as we continue to be the most common-schooled and the least cultivated people in the world, I suppose we must consent to endure this condescending manner of foreigners toward us. The more friendly they mean to be the more ludicrously prominent it becomes. They can never appreciate the immense amount of silent work that has been done here, making this continent slowly fit for the abode of man, and which will demonstrate itself, let us hope, in the character of the people. Outsiders can only be expected to judge a nation by the amount it has contributed to the civilisation of the world; the amount, that is, that can be seen and handled. A great place in history can only be achieved by competitive examinations, nay, by a long course of them. How much new thought have we contributed to the common stock? Till that question can be triumphantly answered, or needs no answer, we must continue to be simply interesting as an experiment, to be studied as a problem, and not respected as an attained result or an accomplished solution. Perhaps, as I have hinted, their patronising manner toward us is the fair result of their failing to see here anything more than a poor imitation, a plaster-cast of Europe. And are they not partly right? If the tone of the uncultivated American has too

often the arrogance of the barbarian, is not that of the cultivated as often vulgarly apologetic? In the America they meet with is there the simplicity, the manliness, the absence of sham, the sincere human nature, the sensitiveness to duty and implied obligation, that in any way distinguishes us from what our orators call "the effete civilisation of the Old World?" Is there a politician among us daring enough (except a Dana here and there) to risk his future on the chance of our keeping our word with the exactness of superstitious communities like England? Is it certain that we shall be ashamed of a bankruptcy of honour, if we can only keep the letter of our bond? I hope we shall be able to answer all these questions with a frank *yes*. At any rate, we would advise our visitors that we are not merely curious creatures, but belong to the family of man, and that, as individuals, we are not to be always subjected to the competitive examination above-mentioned, even if we acknowledged their competence as an examining board. Above all, we beg them to remember that America is not to us, as to them, a mere object of external interest to be discussed and analysed, but *in* us, part of our very marrow. Let them not suppose that we conceive of ourselves as exiles from the graces and amenities of an older date than we, though very much at home in a state of things not yet all it might be or should be but which we mean to make so, and which we find both wholesome and pleasant for men (though perhaps not for *dilettanti*) to live in. "The full tide of human existence" may be felt here as keenly as Johnson felt it at Charing Cross, and in a larger sense. I know one person who is singular enough to think Cambridge the very best spot on the habitable globe. "Doubtless God *could* have made a better, but doubtless he never did."

It will take England a great while to get over her airs of patronage toward us, or even passably to conceal them. She cannot help confounding the people with the country, and regarding us as lusty juveniles. She has a conviction that whatever good there is in us is wholly English, when the

truth is that we are worth nothing except so far as we have disinfected ourselves of Anglicism. She is especially condescending just now, and lavishes sugar-plums on us as if we had not outgrown them. I am no believer in sudden conversions, especially in sudden conversions to a favourable opinion of people who have just proved you to be mistaken in judgment, and therefore unwise in policy. I never blamed her for not wishing well to democracy,—how should she?—but Alabamas are not wishes. Let her not be too hasty in believing Mr. Reverdy Johnson's pleasant words. Though there is no thoughtful man in America who would not consider a war with England the greatest of calamities, yet the feeling towards her here is very far from being cordial, whatever our minister may say in the effusion that comes after ample dining. Mr. Adams, with his famous "My lord, this means war," perfectly represented his country. Justly or not, we have a feeling that we have been wronged, not merely insulted. The only sure way of bringing about a healthy relation between the two countries, is for Englishmen to clear their minds of the notion that we are always to be treated as a kind of inferior and deported Englishman whose nature they perfectly understand, and whose back they accordingly stroke the wrong way of the fur with amazing perseverance. Let them learn to treat us naturally on our merits as human beings, as they would a German or a Frenchman, and not as if we were a kind of counterfeit Briton whose crime appeared in every shade of difference, and before long there would come that right feeling which we naturally call a good understanding. The common blood, and still more the common language, are fatal instruments of misapprehension. Let them give up *trying* to understand us, still more thinking that they do, and acting in various absurd ways as the necessary consequence, for they will never arrive at that devoutly-to-be-wished consummation, till they learn to look at us as we are and not as they suppose us to be. Dear old long-estranged mother-in-law, it is a great many years since we parted. Since 1660,

when you married again, you have been a step-mother to us. Put on your spectacles, dear madam. Yes, we *have* grown, and changed likewise. You would not let us darken your doors if you could help it. We know that perfectly well. But pray, when we look to be treated as men, don't shake that rattle in our faces, nor talk baby to us any longer.

> "Do, child, go to it grandam, child;
> Give grandam kingdom, and it grandam will
> Give it a plum, a cherry, and a fig!"

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## *A GREAT PUBLIC CHARACTER.**

It is the misfortune of American biography that it must needs be more or less provincial, and that, contrary to what might have been predicted, this quality in it predominates in proportion as the country grows larger. Wanting any great and acknowledged centre of national life and thought, our expansion has hitherto been rather aggregation than growth; reputations must be hammered out thin to cover so wide a surface, and the substance of most hardly holds out to the boundaries of a single state. Our very history wants unity, and down to the Revolution the attention is wearied and confused by having to divide itself among thirteen parallel threads, instead of being concentred on a single clue. A sense of remoteness and seclusion comes over us as we read, and we cannot help asking ourselves, "Were *not* these things done in a corner?" Notoriety may be achieved in a narrow sphere, but fame demands for its evidence a more distant and prolonged reverberation. To the world at large we were but a short column of figures in the corner of a blue-book, New England exporting so much salt fish, timber, and Medford rum, Virginia so many hogsheads of tobacco, and buying with the proceeds a certain amount of English manufactures. The story of

* The Life of Josiah Quincy by his son.

our early colonisation had a certain moral interest, to be sure, but was altogether inferior in picturesque fascination to that of Mexico or Peru. The lives of our worthies, like that of our nation, are bare of those foregone and far-reaching associations with names, the divining-rods of fancy, which the soldiers and civilians of the Old World get for nothing by the mere accident of birth. Their historians and biographers have succeeded to the good-will, as well as to the long-established stand, of the shop of glory. Time is, after all, the greatest of poets, and the sons of Memory stand a better chance of being the heirs of Fame. The philosophic poet may find a proud solace in saying,

> "Avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante
> Trita solo;"

but all the while he has the splendid centuries of Greece and Rome behind him, and can begin his poem with invoking a goddess from whom legend derived the planter of his race. His eyes looked out on a landscape saturated with glorious recollections; he had seen Cæsar, and heard Cicero. But who shall conjure with Saugus or Cato Four Corners,—with Israel Putnam or Return Jonathan Meigs? We have been transplanted, and for us the long hierarchical succession of history is broken. The Past has not laid its venerable hands upon us in consecration, conveying to us that mysterious influence whose force is in its continuity. We are to Europe as the Church of England to her of Rome. The latter old lady may be the Scarlet Woman, or the Beast with ten horns, if you will; but hers are all the heirlooms, hers that vast spiritual estate of tradition, nowhere yet everywhere, whose revenues are none the less fruitful for being levied on the imagination. We may claim that England's history is also ours, but it is a *de jure*, and not a *de facto* property that we have in it,—something that may be proved indeed, yet is a merely intellectual satisfaction, and does not savour of the reality. Have we not seen the mockery crown and sceptre of the exiled Stuarts in St. Peter's? the medal struck so lately as

1784 with its legend, HEN IX. MAG BRIT ET HIB REX, whose contractions but faintly typify the scantness of the fact?

As the novelist complains that our society wants that sharp contrast of character and costume which comes of caste, so in the narrative of our historians we miss what may be called background and perspective, as if the events and the actors in them failed of that cumulative interest which only a long historical entail can give. Relatively, the crusade of Sir William Pepperell was of more consequence than that of St. Louis, and yet forgive us, injured shade of the second American baronet, if we find the narrative of Joinville more interesting than your despatches to Governor Shirley. Relatively, the insurrection of that Daniel whose Irish patronymic Shea was euphonised into Shays, as a set-off for the debasing of French *chaise* into *shay*, was more dangerous than that of Charles Edward; but for some reason or other (as vice sometimes has the advantage of virtue) the latter is more enticing to the imagination, and the least authentic relic of it in song or story has a relish denied to the painful industry of Minot. Our events seem to fall short of that colossal proportion which befits the monumental style. Look grave as we will, there is something ludicrous in Counsellor Keane's pig being the pivot of a revolution. We are of yesterday, and it is to no purpose that our political augurs divine from the flight of our eagles that to-morrow shall be ours, and flatter us with an all-hail hereafter. Things do really gain in greatness by being acted on a great and cosmopolitan stage, because there is inspiration in the thronged audience, and the nearer match that puts men on their mettle. Webster was more largely endowed by nature than Fox, and Fisher Ames not much below Burke as a talker; but what a difference in the intellectual training, in the literary culture and associations, in the whole social outfit, of the men who were their antagonists and companions! It should seem that, if it be collision with other minds and with events that strikes or draws the fire from a man, then the quality

of those might have something to do with the quality of the fire—whether it shall be culinary or electric. We have never known the varied stimulus, the inexorable criticism, the many-sided opportunity of a great metropolis, the inspiring reinforcement of an undivided national consciousness. In everything but trade we have missed the invigoration of foreign rivalry. We may prove that we are this and that and the other—our Fourth of July orators have proved it time and again—the census has proved it; but the Muses are women, and have no great fancy for statistics, though easily silenced by them. We are great, we are rich, we are all kinds of good things; but did it never occur to you that somehow we are not interesting, except as a phenomenon? It may safely be affirmed that for one cultivated man in this country who studies American, there are fifty who study European history, ancient or modern.

Till within a year or two we have been as distant and obscure to the eyes of Europe as Ecuador to our own. Every day brings us nearer, enables us to see the Old World more clearly, and by inevitable comparison to judge ourselves with some closer approach to our real value. This has its advantage so long as our culture is, as for a long time it must be, European; for we shall be little better than apes and parrots till we are forced to measure our muscle with the trained and practised champions of that elder civilisation. We have at length established our claim to the noblesse of the sword, the first step still of every nation that would make its entry into the best society of history. To maintain ourselves there, we must achieve an equality in the more exclusive circle of culture, and to that end must submit ourselves to the European standard of intellectual weights and measures. That we have made the hitherto biggest gun might excite apprehension (were there a dearth of iron), but can never exact respect. That our pianos and patent reapers have won medals does but confirm us in our mechanic and material measure of merit. We must contribute something more than mere contrivances

for the saving of labour, which we have been only too ready to misapply in the domain of thought and the higher kinds of invention. In those Olympic games where nations contend for truly immortal wreaths, it may well be questioned whether a mowing-machine would stand much chance in the chariot-races—whether a piano, though made by a chevalier, could compete successfully for the prize of music.

We shall have to be content for a good while yet with our provincialism, and must strive to make the best of it. In it lies the germ of nationality, and that is, after all, the prime condition of all thoroughbred greatness of character. To this choicest fruit of a healthy life, well rooted in native soil, and drawing prosperous juices thence, nationality gives the keenest flavour. Mr. Lincoln was an original man, and in so far a great man; yet it was the Americanism of his every thought, word, and act which not only made his influence equally at home in East and West, but drew the eyes of the outside world, and was the pedestal that lifted him where he could be seen by them. Lincoln showed that native force may transcend local boundaries, but the growth of such nationality is hindered and hampered by our division into so many half-independent communities, each with its objects of county ambition, and its public men great to the borders of their district. In this way our standard of greatness is insensibly debased. To receive any national appointment, a man must have gone through precisely the worst training for it; he must have so far narrowed and belittled himself with State politics as to be acceptable at home. In this way a man may become chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs because he knows how to pack a caucus in Catawampus County, or be sent ambassador to Barataria because he has drunk bad whiskey with every voter in Wildcat City. Should we ever attain to a conscious nationality, it will have the advantage of lessening the number of our great men, and widening our appreciation to the larger scale of the two or three that are left—if there should be so many. Meanwhile

we offer a premium to the production of great men in a small way, by inviting each State to set up the statues of two of its immortals in the Capitol. What a niggardly percentage! Already we are embarrassed, not to find the two, but to choose among the crowd of candidates. Well, seventy odd heroes in about as many years is pretty well for a young nation. We do not envy most of them their eternal martyrdom in marble, their pillory of indiscrimination. We fancy even native tourists pausing before the greater part of the effigies, and, after reading the names, asking desperately, "Who was *he?*" Nay, if they should say, "Who the devil was *he?*" it were a pardonable invocation, for none so fit as the Prince of Darkness to act as *cicerone* among such palpable obscurities. We recall the court-yard of the Uffizj at Florence. That also is not free of parish celebrities; but Dante, Galileo, Michael Angelo, Macchiavelli—shall the inventor of the sewing machine, even with the button-holing improvement, let us say, match with these, or with far lesser than these? Perhaps he was more practically useful than any one of these, or all of them together, but the soul is sensible of a sad difference somewhere. These also were citizens of a provincial capital; so were the greater part of Plutarch's heroes. Did they have a better chance than we moderns—than we Americans? At any rate they have the start of us, and we must confess that

> "By bed and table they lord it o'er us,
> Our elder brothers, but one in blood."

Yes, one in blood; that is the hardest part of it. Is our provincialism then in some great measure due to our absorption in the practical, as we politely call it, meaning the material—to our habit of estimating greatness by the square mile and the hundredweight? Even during our war, in the midst of that almost unrivalled stress of soul, were not our speakers and newspapers so enslaved to the vulgar habit as to boast ten times of the thousands of square miles it covered with armed men, for once that they alluded to

the motive that gave it all its meaning and its splendour? Perhaps it was as well that they did not exploit that passion of patriotism as an advertisement in the style of Barnum or Perham. "I scale one hundred and eighty pounds, but when I'm mad I weigh two ton," said the Kentuckian, with a true notion of moral avoirdupois. That ideal kind of weight is wonderfully increased by a national feeling, whereby one man is conscious that thirty millions of men go into the balance with him. The Roman in ancient, and the Englishman in modern times, have been most conscious of this representative solidity, and wherever one of them went there stood Rome or England in his shoes. We have made some advance in the right direction. Our civil war, by the breadth of its proportions and the implacability of its demands, forced us to admit a truer valuation, and gave us, in our own despite, great soldiers and sailors, allowed for such by all the world. The harder problems it has left behind may in time compel us to have great statesmen, with views capable of reaching beyond the next election. The criticism of Europe alone can rescue us from the provincialism of an over or false estimate of ourselves. Let us be thankful, and not angry, that we must accept it as our touchstone. Our stamp has so often been impressed upon base metal, that we cannot expect it to be taken on trust, but we may be sure that true gold will be equally persuasive the world over. Real manhood and honest achievement are nowhere provincial, but enter the select society of all time on an even footing.

Spanish America might be a good glass for us to look into. Those Catharine-wheel republics, always in revolution while the powder lasts, and sure to burn the fingers of whoever attempts intervention, have also their great men, as placidly ignored by us as our own by jealous Europe. The following passage from the life of Don Simon Bolivar might allay many *motus animorum*, if rightly pondered. Bolivar, then a youth, was travelling in Italy, and his biographer tells us that, "near Castiglione he was present at the grand review made by Napoleon of the columns

defiling into the plain large enough to contain sixty thousand men. The throne was situated on an eminence that overlooked the plain, and Napoleon on several occasions looked through a glass at Bolivar and his companions, who were at the base of the hill. The hero Cæsar could not imagine he beheld the liberator of the world of Columbus!" And small blame to him, one would say. We are not, then, it seems, the only foundling of Columbus, as we are so apt to take for granted. The great Genoese did not, as we supposed, draw that first star-guided furrow across the vague of waters with a single eye to the future greatness of the United States. And have we not sometimes, like the enthusiastic biographer, fancied the Old World staring through all its telescopes at us, and wondered that it did not recognise in us what we were fully persuaded we were *going* to be and do?

Our American life is dreadfully barren of those elements of the social picturesque which give piquancy to anecdote. And without anecdote, what is biography, or even history, which is only biography on a larger scale? Clio, though she takes airs on herself, and pretend to be "philosophy teaching by example," is, after all, but a gossip who has borrowed Fame's speaking-trumpet, and should be figured with a tea-cup instead of a scroll in her hand. How much has she not owed of late to the tittle-tattle of her gillflirt sister Thalia? In what gutters has not Macaulay raked for the brilliant bits with which he has put together his admirable mosaic picture of England under the last two Stuarts? Even Mommsen himself, who dislikes Plutarch's method as much as Montaigne loved it, cannot get or give a lively notion of ancient Rome, without running to the comic poets and the anecdote-mongers. He gives us the very beef-tea of history, nourishing and even palatable enough, excellently portable for a memory that must carry her own packs, and can afford little luggage; but for our own part, we prefer a full, old-fashioned meal, with its side-dishes of spicy gossip, and its last relish, the Stilton of scandal, so it be not too high. One volume of contemporary

memoirs, stuffed though it be with lies (for lies to be good for anything must have a potential probability, must even be true so far as their moral and social setting is concerned) will throw more light into the dark backward of time than the gravest Camden or Thuanus. If St. Simon is not accurate, is he any the less essentially *true?* No history gives us so clear an understanding of the moral condition of average men after the restoration of the Stuarts as the unconscious blabbings of the Puritan tailor's son, with his two consciences, as it were—an inward, still sensitive in spots, though mostly toughened to India-rubber, and good rather for rubbing out old scores than retaining them, and an outward, alert, and termagantly effective in Mrs. Pepys. But we can have no St. Simons or Pepyses till we have a Paris or London to delocalise our gossip and give it historic breadth. All our capitals are fractional, merely greater or smaller gatherings of men, centres of business rather than of action or influence. Each contains so many souls, but is not, as the word "capital" implies, the true head of a community and seat of its common soul.

Has not life itself perhaps become a little more prosaic than it once was? As the clearing away of the woods scants the streams, may not our civilisation have dried up some feeders that helped to swell the current of individual and personal force? We have sometimes thought that the stricter definition and consequent seclusion from each other of the different callings in modern times, as it narrowed the chance of developing and giving variety to character, lessened also the interest of biography. Formerly arts and arms were not divided by so impassable a barrier as now. There was hardly such a thing as a *pékin.* Cæsar gets up from writing his Latin Grammar to conquer Gaul, change the course of history, and make so many things possible—among the rest our English language and Shakespeare. Horace had been a colonel; and from Æschylus, who fought at Marathon, to Ben Jonson, who trailed a pike in the Low Countries, the

list of martial civilians is a long one. A man's education seems more complete who has smelt hostile powder from a less æsthetic distance than Goethe. It raises our confidence in Sir Kenelm Digby as a physicist, that he is able to illustrate some theory of acoustics in his Treatise of Bodies by instancing the effect of his guns in a sea-fight off Scanderoon. One would expect the proportions of character to be enlarged by such variety and contrast of experience. Perhaps it will by-and-by appear that our own Civil War has done something for us in this way. Colonel Higginson comes down from his pulpit to draw on his jackboots, and thenceforth rides in our imagination alongside of John Bunyan and Bishop Compton. To have stored moral capital enough to meet the drafts of Death at sight must be an unmatched tonic. We saw our light-hearted youth come back with the modest gravity of age, as if they had learned to throw out pickets against a surprise of any weak point in their temperament. Perhaps that American shiftiness, so often complained of, may not be so bad a thing, if, by bringing men acquainted with every humour of fortune and human nature, it puts them in fuller possession of themselves.

But with whatever drawbacks in special circumstances, the main interest of biography must always lie in the amount of character or essential manhood which the subject of it reveals to us, and events are of import only as means to that end. It is true that lofty and far-seen exigencies may give greater opportunity to some men, whose energy is more sharply spurred by the shout of a multitude than by the grudging *Well done!* of conscience. Some theorists have too hastily assumed that, as the power of public opinion increases, the force of private character, or what we call originality, is absorbed into and diluted by it. But we think Horace was right in putting tyrant and mob on a level as the trainers and tests of a man's solid quality. The amount of resistance of which one is capable to whatever lies outside the conscience is of more consequence than all other faculties together; and democracy,

perhaps, tries this by pressure in more directions, and with a more continuous strain, than any other form of society. In Josiah Quincy we have an example of character trained and shaped, under the nearest approach to a pure democracy the world has ever seen, to a firmness, unity, and self-centred poise that recall the finer types of antiquity, in whom the public and private man was so wholly of a piece that they were truly everywhere at home, for the same sincerity of nature that dignified the hearth carried also a charm of homeliness into the forum. The phrase "a great public character," once common, seems to be going out of fashion, perhaps because there are fewer examples of the thing. It fits Josiah Quincy exactly. Active in civic and academic duties till beyond the ordinary period of man, at fourscore and ten his pen, voice, and venerable presence were still efficient in public affairs. A score of years after the energies of even vigorous men are declining or spent, his mind and character made themselves felt as in their prime. A true pillar of house and state, he stood unflinchingly upright under whatever burden might be laid upon him. The French Revolutionists aped what was itself but a parody of the elder republic, with their hair *à la* Brutus, and their pedantic moralities *à la* Cato Minor, but this man unconsciously was the antique Roman they laboriously went about to be. Others have filled places more conspicuous, few have made the place they filled so conspicuous by an exact and disinterested performance of duty.

In the biography of Mr. Quincy by his son there is something of the provincialism of which we have spoken as inherent in most American works of the kind. His was a Boston life in the strictest sense. But provincialism is relative, and where it has a flavour of its own, as in Scotland, it is often agreeable in proportion to its very intensity. The Massachusetts in which Mr. Quincy's habits of thought were acquired was a very different Massachusetts from that in which we of later generations have been bred. Till after he had passed middle life, Boston was

more truly a capital than any other city in America, before or since, except possibly Charleston. The acknowledged head of New England, with a population of well-nigh purely English descent, mostly derived from the earlier emigration, with ancestral traditions and inspiring memories of its own, it had made its name familiar in both worlds, and was both historically and politically more important than at any later period. The Revolution had not interrupted, but rather given a freer current to the tendencies of its past. Both by its history and position, the town had what the French call a solidarity, an almost personal consciousness, rare anywhere, rare especially in America, and more than ever since our enormous importation of fellow-citizens, to whom America means merely shop, or meat three times a-day. Boston has been called the "American Athens." Æsthetically, the comparison is ludicrous, but politically it was more reasonable. Its population was homogeneous, and there were leading families; while the form of government by town-meeting, and the facility of social and civic intercourse, gave great influence to popular personal qualities and opportunity to new men. A wide commerce, while it had insensibly softened the asperities of Puritanism and imported enough foreign refinement to humanise, not enough foreign luxury to corrupt, had not essentially qualified the native tone of the town. Retired sea-captains (true brothers of Chaucer's Shipman), whose exploits had kindled the imagination of Burke, added a not unpleasant savour of salt to society. They belonged to the old school of Gilbert, Hawkins, Frobisher, and Drake, parcel-soldiers all of them, who had commanded armed ships, and had tales to tell of gallant fights with privateers or pirates, truest representatives of those Vikings who, if trade in lumber or peltry was dull, would make themselves Dukes of Dublin or Earls of Orkney. If trade pinches the mind, commerce liberalises it; and Boston was also advantaged with the neighbourhood of the country's oldest College, which maintained the wholesome traditions of culture,—where Homer and Horace are

familiar there is a certain amount of cosmopolitanism—and would not allow bigotry to become despotism. Manners were more self-respectful, and therefore more respectful of others, and personal sensitiveness was fenced with more of that ceremonial with which society armed itself when it surrendered the ruder protection of the sword. We had not then seen a Governor in his chamber at the State House with his hat on, a cigar in his mouth, and his feet upon the stove. Domestic service, in spite of the proverb, was not seldom an inheritance, nor was household peace dependent on the whim of a foreign armed neutrality in the kitchen. Servant and master were of one stock; there was decent authority and becoming respect; the tradition of the Old World lingered after its superstition had passed away. There was an aristocracy such as is healthful in a well-ordered community, founded on public service, and hereditary so long as the virtue which was its patent was not escheated. The clergy, no longer hedged by the reverence exacted by sacerdotal caste, were more than repaid by the consideration willingly paid to superior culture. What changes, many of them for the better, some of them surely for the worse, and all of them inevitable, did not Josiah Quincy see in that well-nigh secular life which linked the war of independence to the war of nationality! We seemed to see a type of them the other day in a coloured man standing with an air of comfortable self-possession while his boots were brushed by a youth of catholic neutral tint, but whom nature had planned for white. The same eyes that looked on Gage's redcoats, saw Colonel Shaw's negro regiment march out of Boston in the national blue. Seldom has a life, itself actively associated with public affairs, spanned so wide a chasm for the imagination. Oglethorpe's offers a parallel—the aide-de-camp of Prince Eugène calling on John Adams, American Ambassador to England. Most long lives resemble those threads of gossamer, the nearest approach to nothing unmeaningly prolonged, scarce visible pathway of some worm from his cradle to his grave; but Quincy's was

strung with seventy active years, each one a rounded bead of usefulness and service.

Mr. Quincy was a Bostonian of the purest type. Since the settlement of the town, there had been a colonel of the Boston regiment in every generation of his family. He lived to see a grandson brevetted with the same title for gallantry in the field. Only child of one among the most eminent advocates of the Revolution, and who but for his untimely death would have been a leading actor in it, his earliest recollections belonged to the heroic period in the history of his native town. With that history his life was thenceforth intimately united by offices of public trust, as Representative in Congress, State Senator, Mayor, and President of the University, to a period beyond the ordinary span of mortals. Even after he had passed ninety, he would not claim to be *emeritus*, but came forward to brace his townsmen with a courage and warm them with a fire younger than their own. The legend of Colonel Goffe at Deerfield became a reality to the eyes of this generation. The New England breed is running out, we are told! This was in all ways a beautiful and fortunate life—fortunate in the goods of this world—fortunate, above all, in the force of character which makes fortune secondary and subservient. We are fond in this country of what are called self-made men (as if real success could ever be other); and this is all very well, provided they make something worth having of themselves. Otherwise it is not so well, and the examples of such are at best but stuff for the Alnaschar dreams of a false democracy. The gist of the matter is, not where a man starts from, but where he comes out. We are glad to have the biography of one who, beginning as a gentleman, kept himself such to the end—who, with no necessity of labour, left behind him an amount of thoroughly done work such as few have accomplished with the mighty help of hunger. Some kind of pace may be got out of the veriest jade by the near prospect of oats; but the thoroughbred has the spur in his blood.

Mr. Edmund Quincy has told the story of his father's life with the skill and good taste that might have been expected from the author of "Wensley." Considering natural partialities, he has shown a discretion of which we are oftener reminded by missing than by meeting it. He has given extracts enough from speeches to show their bearing and quality—from letters, to recall bygone modes of thought and indicate many-sided friendly relations with good and eminent men; above all, he has lost no opportunity to illustrate that life of the past, near in date, yet alien in manners, whose current glides so imperceptibly from one generation into another that we fail to mark the shiftings of its bed or the change in its nature wrought by the affluents that discharge into it on all sides—here a stream bred in the hills to sweeten, there the sewerage of some great city to corrupt. We cannot but lament that Mr. Quincy did not earlier begin to keep a diary. "Miss not the discourses of the elders," though put now in the Apocrypha, is a wise precept, but incomplete unless we add, "Nor cease from recording whatsoever thing thou hast gathered therefrom"—so ready is Oblivion with her fatal shears. The somewhat greasy heap of a literary rag-and-bone-picker, like Athenæus, is turned to gold by time. Even the *Virgilium vidi tantum* of Dryden about Milton, and of Pope again about Dryden, is worth having, and gives a pleasant fillip to the fancy. There is much of this quality in Mr. Edmund Quincy's book, enough to make us wish there were more. We get a glimpse of President Washington, in 1795, who reminded Mr. Quincy "of the gentlemen who used to come to Boston in those days to attend the General Court from Hampden or Franklin County, in the western part of the western State. A little stiff in his person, not a little formal in his manners, not particularly at ease in the presence of strangers. He had the air of a country gentleman not accustomed to mix much in society, perfectly polite, but not easy in his address and conversation, and not graceful in his gait and movements." Our figures of Washington have been so long equestrian,

that it is pleasant to meet him dismounted for once. In the same way we get a card of invitation to a dinner of sixty covers at John Hancock's, and see the rather light-weighted great man wheeled round the room (for he had adopted Lord Chatham's convenient trick of the gout) to converse with his guests. It another place we are presented, with Mr. Merry, the English Minister, to Jefferson, whom we find in an unofficial costume of studied slovenliness, intended as a snub to haughty Albion. Slippers down at heel and a dirty shirt become weapons of diplomacy and threaten more serious war. Thus many a door into the past, long irrevocably shut upon us, is set ajar, and we of the younger generation on the landing catch peeps of distinguished men, and bits of their table-talk. We drive in from Mr. Lyman's beautiful seat at Waltham (unique at that day in its stately swans and half shy, half familiar deer) with John Adams, who tells us that Dr. Priestley looked on the French monarchy as the tenth horn of the Beast in Revelation—a horn that has set more sober wits dancing than that of Huon of Bordeaux. Those were days, we are inclined to think, of more solid and elegant hospitality than our own—the elegance of manners, at once more courtly and more frugal, of men who had better uses for wealth than merely to display it. Dinners have more courses now, and like the Gascon in the old story, who could not see the town for the houses, we miss the real dinner in the multiplicity of its details. We might seek long before we found so good cheer, so good company, or so good talk as our fathers had at Lieutenant-Governor Winthrop's or Senator Cabot's.

We shall not do Mr. Edmund Quincy the wrong of picking out in advance all the plums in his volume, leaving to the reader only the less savoury mixture that held them together—a kind of filling unavoidable in books of this kind, and too apt to be what boys at boarding-school call *stick-jaw*, but of which there is no more than could not be helped here, and that light and palatable. But here and there is a passage where we cannot refrain, for there is a

smack of Jack Horner in all of us, and a reviewer were nothing without it. Josiah Quincy was born in 1772. His father, returning from a mission in England, died in sight of the dear New England shore three years later. His young widow was worthy of him, and of the son whose character she was to have so large a share in forming. There is something very touching and beautiful in this little picture of her which Mr. Quincy drew in his extreme old age.

"My mother imbibed, as was usual with the women of the period, the spirit of the times. Patriotism was not then a profession, but an energetic principle beating in the heart and active in the life. The death of my father, under circumstances now the subject of history, had overwhelmed her with grief. She viewed him as a victim in the cause of freedom, and cultivated his memory with veneration, regarding him as a martyr, falling, as did his friend Warren, in the defence of the liberties of his country. These circumstances gave a pathos and vehemence to her grief, which, after the first violence of passion had subsided, sought consolation in earnest and solicitous fulfilment of duty to the representative of his memory and of their mutual affections. Love and reverence for the memory of his father were early impressed on the mind of her son, and worn into his heart by her sadness and tears. She cultivated the memory of my father in my heart and affections, even in my earliest childhood, by reading to me passages from the poets, and obliging me to learn by heart and repeat such as were best adapted to her own circumstances and feelings. Among others, the whole leave-taking of Hector and Andromache, in the sixth book of Pope's Homer, was one of her favourite lessons, which she made me learn and frequently repeat. Her imagination probably found consolation in the repetition of lines which brought to mind and seemed to typify her own great bereavement.

> "'And think'st thou not how wretched we shall be,—
> A widow I, a helpless orphan he?'

These lines and the whole tenor of Andromache's address

and circumstances, she identified with her own sufferings, which seemed relieved by the tears my repetition of them drew from her."

Pope's Homer is not Homer, perhaps; but how many noble natures have felt its elation, how many bruised spirits the solace of its bracing, if monotonous melody! To us there is something inexpressibly tender in this instinct of the widowed mother to find consolation in the idealisation of her grief by mingling it with those sorrows which genius has turned into the perennial delight of mankind. This was a kind of sentiment that was healthy for her boy, refining without unnerving, and associating his father's memory with a noble company unassailable by time. It was through this lady, whose image looks down on us out of the past, so full of sweetness and refinement, that Mr. Quincy became of kin with Mr. Wendell Phillips, so justly eminent as a speaker. There is something nearer than cater-cousinship in a certain impetuous audacity of temper common to them both.

When six years old, Mr. Quincy was sent to Phillips's Academy at Andover, where he remained till he entered college. His form-fellow here was a man of thirty, who had been a surgeon in the Continental army, and whose character and adventures might almost seem borrowed from a romance of Smollett. Under Principal Pearson, the lad, though a near relative of the founder of the school, seems to have endured all that severity of the old *à posteriori* method of teaching which still smarted in Tusser's memory when he sang—

> "From Paul's I went, to Eton sent,
> To learn straightways the Latin phrase,
> Where fifty-three stripes given to me
> At once I had."

The young victim of the wisdom of Solomon was boarded with the parish minister, in whose kindness he found a lenitive for the scholastic discipline he underwent. This gentleman had been a soldier in the Colonial service, and Mr. Quincy afterwards gave as a reason for his mildness,

that, "while a sergeant at Castle William, he had seen something of mankind." This, no doubt, would be a better preparative for successful dealing with the young than is generally thought. However, the birch was then the only classic tree, and every round in the ladder of learning was made of its inspiring wood. Dr. Pearson, perhaps, thought he was only doing justice to his pupil's claims of kindred by giving him a larger share of the educational advantages which the neighbouring forest afforded. The vividness with which this system is always remembered by those who have been subjected to it would seem to show that it really enlivened the attention, and thereby invigorated the memory, nay, might even raise some question as to what part of the person is chosen by the mother of the Muses for her residence. With an appetite for the classics quickened by "Cheever's Accidence," and such other preliminary whets as were then in vogue, young Quincy entered college, where he spent the usual four years, and was graduated with the highest honours of his class. The amount of Latin and Greek imparted to the students of that day was not very great. They were carried through Horace, Sallust, and the *De Oratoribus* of Cicero, and read portions of Livy, Xenophon, and Homer. Yet the chief end of classical studies was perhaps as often reached then as now, in giving young men a love for something apart from and above the more vulgar associations of life. Mr. Quincy, at least, retained to the last a fondness for certain Latin authors. While he was President of the College, he told a gentleman, from whom we received the story, that, "if he were imprisoned, and allowed to choose one book for his amusement, that should be Horace."

In 1797 Mr. Quincy was married to Miss Eliza Susan Morton, of New York, a union which lasted in unbroken happiness for more than fifty years. His cause might be cited among the leading ones in support of the old poet's axiom, that

"He never loved, that loved not at first sight;"

for he saw, wooed, and won in a week. In later life he tried in a most amusing way to account for this rashness, and to find reasons of settled gravity for the happy inspiration of his heart. He cites the evidence of Judge Sedgwick, of Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Wolcott, of the Rev. Dr. Smith, and others, to the wisdom of his choice. But it does not appear that he consulted them beforehand. If love were not too cunning for that, what would become of the charming idyl, renewed in all its wonder and freshness for every generation? Let us be thankful that in every man's life there is a holiday of romance, an illumination of the senses by the soul, that makes him a poet while it lasts. Mr. Quincy caught the enchantment through his ears, a song of Burns heard from the next room conveying the infection—a fact still inexplicable to him after lifelong meditation thereon, as he "was not very impressible by music!" To us there is something very characteristic in this rapid energy of Mr. Quincy, something very delightful in his naïve account of the affair. It needs the magic of no Dr. Heidegger to make these dried roses, that drop from between the leaves of a volume shut for seventy years, bloom again in all their sweetness. Mr. Edmund Quincy tells us that his mother was "not handsome;" but those who remember the gracious dignity of her old age will hardly agree with him. She must always have had that highest kind of beauty which grows more beautiful with years, and keeps the eyes young, as if with the partial connivance of Time.

We do not propose to follow Mr. Quincy closely through his whole public life, which, beginning with his thirty-second, ended with his seventy-third year. He entered Congress as the representative of a party privately the most respectable, publicly the least sagacious, among all those which under different names have divided the country. The Federalists were the only proper Tories our politics have ever produced, whose conservatism truly represented an idea, and not a mere selfish interest—men who honestly distrusted democracy, and stood up for experience,

or the tradition which they believed for such, against empiricism. During his Congressional career, the Government was little more than an *attaché* of the French legation, and the Opposition to which he belonged a helpless *revenant* from the dead and buried Colonial past. There are some questions whose interest dies the moment they are settled; others into which a moral element enters that hinders them from being settled, though they may be decided. It is hard to revive any enthusiasm about the *Embargo*, though it once could inspire the boyish muse of Bryant, or in the impressment quarrel, though the Trent difficulty for a time rekindled its old animosities. The stars in their courses fought against Mr. Quincy's party, which was not in sympathy with the instincts of the people, groping about for some principle of nationality, and finding a substitute for it in hatred of England. But there are several things which still make his career in Congress interesting to us, because they illustrate the personal character of the man. He prepared himself honestly for his duties, by a thorough study of whatever could make him efficient in them. It was not enough that he could make a good speech; he wished also to have something to say. In Congress, as everywhere else, *quod voluit valde voluit;* and he threw a fervour into the most temporary topic, as if his eternal salvation depended upon it. He had not merely, as the French say, the courage of his opinions, but his opinions became principles, and gave him that gallantry of fanaticism which made him always ready to head a forlorn hope —the more ready, perhaps, that it was a forlorn hope. This is not the humour of a statesman—no, unless he holds a position like that of Pitt, and can charge a whole people with his own enthusiasm, and then we call it genius. Mr. Quincy had the moral firmness which enabled him to decline a duel without any loss of personal *prestige*. His opposition to the Louisiana purchase illustrates that Roman quality in him to which we have alluded. He would not conclude the purchase till each of the old thirteen States had signified its assent. He was reluctant to endow a Sabine city with the

privilege of Roman citizenship. It is worth noting that, while in Congress, and afterwards in the State Senate, many of his phrases became the catchwords of party politics. He always dared to say what others deemed it more prudent only to think, and whatever he said he intensified with the whole ardour of his temperament. It is this which makes Mr. Quincy's speeches good reading still, even when the topics they discussed were ephemeral. In one respect he is distinguished from the politicians, and must rank with the far-seeing statesmen of his time. He early foresaw and denounced the political danger with which the Slave Power threatened the Union. His fears, it is true, were aroused for the balance of power between the old States, rather than by any moral sensitiveness which would, indeed, have been an anachronism at that time. But the Civil War justified his prescience.

It was as mayor of his native city that his remarkable qualities as an administrator were first called into requisition and adequately displayed. He organised the city government, and put it in working order. To him we owe many reforms in police, in the management of the poor, and other kindred matters, much in the way of cure, still more in that of prevention. The place demanded a man of courage and firmness, and found those qualities almost superabundantly in him. His virtues lost him his office, as such virtues are only too apt to do in peaceful times, where they are felt more as a restraint than a protection. His address on laying down the mayoralty is very characteristic. We quote the concluding sentences:—

"And now, gentlemen, standing as I do in this relation for the last time in your presence and that of my fellow-citizens, about to surrender for ever a station full of difficulty, of labour and temptation, in which I have been called to very arduous duties, affecting the rights, property, and at times the liberty of others; concerning which the perfect line of rectitude—though desired—was not always to be clearly discerned; in which great interests have been placed within my control, under circumstances in which it

would have been easy to advance private ends and sinister projects; under these circumstances, I inquire, as I have a right to inquire—for in the recent contest insinuations have been cast against my integrity—in this long management of your affairs, whatever errors have been committed—and doubtless there have been many—have you found in me anything selfish, anything personal, anything mercenary? In the simple language of an ancient seer, I say, 'Behold, here I am; witness against me. Whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? At whose hands have I received any bribe?'

"Six years ago, when I had the honour first to address the City Council, in anticipation of the event which has now occurred, the following expressions were used: 'In administering the police, in executing the laws, in protecting the rights and promoting the prosperity of the city, its first officer will be necessarily beset and assailed by individual interests, by rival projects, by personal influences, by party passions. The more firm and inflexible he is in maintaining the rights and in pursuing the interests of the city, the greater is the probability of his becoming obnoxious to the censure of all whom he causes to be prosecuted or punished, of all whose passions he thwarts, of all whose interests he opposes.'

"The day and the event have come. I retire—as in that first address I told my fellow-citizens, 'If, in conformity with the experience of other republics, faithful exertions should be followed by loss of favour and confidence,' I should retire—'rejoicing, not, indeed, with a public and patriotic, but with a private and individual joy;' for I shall retire with a consciousness weighed against which all *human suffrages* are but as the light dust of the balance."

Of his mayoralty we have another anecdote quite Roman in colour. He was in the habit of riding early in the morning through the various streets that he might look into everything with his own eyes. He was once arrested on a malicious charge of violating the city ordinance against fast driving. He might have resisted, but he appeared in court

and paid the fine, because it would serve as a good example "that no citizen was above the law."

Hardly had Mr. Quincy given up the government of the city, when he was called to that of the College. It is here that his stately figure is associated most intimately and warmly with the recollections of the greater number who hold his memory dear. Almost everybody looks back regretfully to the days of some Consul Plancus. Never were eyes so bright, never had wine so much wit and good-fellowship in it, never were we ourselves so capable of the various great things we have never done. Nor is it merely the sunset of life that casts such a ravishing light on the past, and makes the western windows of those homes of fancy we have left for ever tremble with a sentiment of such sweet regret. We set great store by what we had, and cannot have again, however indifferent in itself, and what is past is infinitely past. This is especially true of college life, when we first assume the titles without the responsibilities of manhood, and the President of our year is apt to become our Plancus very early. Popular or not while in office, an ex-president is always sure of enthusiastic cheers at every college festival. Mr. Quincy had many qualities calculated to win favour with the young—that one above all which is sure to do it, indomitable pluck. With him the dignity was in the man, not in the office. He had some of those little oddities, too, which afford amusement without contempt, and which rather tend to heighten than diminish personal attachment to superiors in station.—His punctuality at prayers, and in dropping asleep there, his forgetfulness of names, his singular inability to make even the shortest off-hand speech to the students—all the more singular in a practised orator—his occasional absorption of mind, leading him to hand you his sand-box instead of the leave of absence he had just dried with it,—the old-fashioned courtesy of his, "Sir, your servant," as he bowed you out of his study,—all tended to make him popular. He had also a little of what is somewhat contradictorily called dry humour, not without influence in his relation with the

students. In taking leave of the graduating class, he was in the habit of paying them whatever honest compliment he could. Who, of a certain year which shall be nameless, will ever forget the gravity with which he assured them that they were "the *best-dressed* class that had passed through college during his administration?" How sincerely kind he was, how considerate of youthful levity, will always be gratefully remembered by whoever had occasion to experience it. A visitor not long before his death found him burning some memoranda of college peccadilloes, lest they should ever rise up in judgment against the men eminent in Church and State who had been guilty of them. One great element of his popularity with the students was his *esprit de corps.* However strict in discipline, he was always on *our* side as respected the outside world. Of his efficiency, no higher testimony could be asked than that of his successor, Dr. Walker. Here also many reforms date from his time. He had that happiest combination for a wise vigour in the conduct of affairs,—he was a conservative with an open mind.

One would be apt to think that, in the various offices which Mr. Quincy successively filled, he would have found enough to do. But his indefatigable activity overflowed. Even as a man of letters, he occupies no inconsiderable place. His "History of Harvard College" is a valuable and entertaining treatment of a subject not wanting in natural dryness. His "Municipal History of Boston," his "History of the Boston Athenæum," and his "Life of Colonel Shaw" have permanent interest and value. All these were works demanding no little labour and research, and the thoroughness of their workmanship makes them remarkable as the by-productions of a busy man. Having consented, when more than eighty, to write a memoir of John Quincy Adams, to be published in the "Proceedings" of the Massachusetts Historical Society, he was obliged to excuse himself. On account of his age? Not at all, but because the work had grown to be a volume under his weariless hand. *Ohne Hast ohne Rast*, was as true of him

as of Goethe. We find the explanation of his accomplishing so much in a rule of life which he gave, when president, to a young man employed as his secretary, and who was a little behindhand with his work: "When you have a number of duties to perform, always do the most disagreeable one first." No advice could have been more in character, and it is perhaps better than the great German's, "Do the duty that lies nearest thee."

Perhaps the most beautiful part of Mr. Quincy's life was his old age. What in most men is decay, was in him but beneficent prolongation and adjournment. His interest in affairs unabated, his judgment undimmed, his fire unchilled, his last years were indeed "lovely as a Lapland night." Till within a year or two of its fall, there were no signs of dilapidation in that stately edifice. Singularly felicitous was Mr. Winthrop's application to him of Wordsworth's verses:—

> "The monumental pomp of age
> Was in that goodly personage."

Everything that Macbeth foreboded the want of, he had in deserved abundance—the love, the honour, the obedience, the troops of friends. His equanimity was beautiful. He loved life, as men of large vitality always do, but he did not fear to lose life by changing the scene of it. Visiting him in his ninetieth year with a friend, he said to us, among other things—"I have no desire to die, but also no reluctance. Indeed, I have a considerable curiosity about the other world. I have never been to Europe, you know." Even in his extreme senescence there was an April mood somewhere in his nature "that put a spirit of youth in everything." He seemed to feel that he could draw against an unlimited credit of years. When eighty-two, he said smilingly to a young man just returned from a foreign tour, "Well, well, I mean to go myself when I am old enough to profit by it." We have seen many old men whose lives were mere waste and desolation, who made longevity disreputable by their untimely persistence in it; but in Mr.

Quincy's length of years there was nothing that was not venerable. To him it was fulfilment, not deprivation; the days were marked to the last for what they brought, not for what they took away.

The memory of what Mr. Quincy did will be lost in the crowd of newer activities; it is the memory of what he was that is precious to us. *Bonum virum facile crederes, magnum libenter.* If John Winthrop be the highest type of the men who shaped New England, we can find no better one of those whom New England has shaped than Josiah Quincy. It is a figure that we can contemplate with more than satisfaction—a figure of admirable example in a democracy as that of a model citizen. His courage and high-mindedness were personal to him; let us believe that his integrity, his industry, his love of letters, his devotion to duty, go in some sort to the credit of the society which gave him birth and formed his character. In one respect he is especially interesting to us, as belonging to a class of men of whom he was the last representative, and whose like we shall never see again. Born and bred in an age of greater social distinction than ours, he was an aristocrat in a sense that is good even in a republic. He had the sense of a certain personal dignity *inherent* in him, and which could not be alienated by any whim of the popular will. There is no stouter buckler than this for independence of spirit, no surer guaranty of that courtesy which, in its consideration of others, is but paying a debt of self-respect. During his presidency, Mr. Quincy was once riding to Cambridge in a crowded omnibus. A coloured woman got in, and could nowhere find a seat. The President instantly gave her his own, and stood the rest of the way, a silent rebuke of the general rudeness. He was a man of quality in the true sense—of quality not hereditary, but personal. Position might be taken from him, but *he* remained where he was. In what he valued most, his sense of personal worth, the world's opinion could neither help nor hinder. We do not mean that this was conscious in him; if it had been, it would have been a weakness. It was an instinct, and acted

with the force and promptitude proper to such. Let us hope that the scramble of democracy will give us something as good; anything of so classic dignity we shall not look to see again.

Josiah Quincy was no seeker of office; from first to last he and it were drawn together by the mutual attraction of need and fitness, and it clung to him as most men cling to it. The people often make blunders in their choice; they are apt to mistake presence of speech for presence of mind; they love so to help a man rise from the ranks, that they will spoil a good demagogue to make a bad general; a great many faults may be laid at their door, but they are not fairly to be charged with fickleness. They are constant to whoever is constant to his real self, to the best manhood that is in him, and not to the mere selfishness, the *antica lupa* so cunning to hide herself in the sheep's fleece even from ourselves. It is true, the contemporary world is apt to be the gull of brilliant parts, and the maker of a lucky poem or picture or statue, the winner of a lucky battle, gets perhaps more than is due to the solid result of his triumph. It is time that fit honour should be paid also to him who shows a genius for public usefulness, for the achievement of character, who shapes his life to a certain classic proportion, and comes off conqueror on those inward fields where something more than mere talent is demanded for victory. The memory of such men should be cherished as the most precious inheritance which one generation can bequeath to the next. However it might be with public favour, public respect followed Mr. Quincy unwaveringly for seventy years, and it was because he had never forfeited his own. In this, it appears to us, lies the lesson of his life, and his claim upon our grateful recollection. It is this which makes him an example, while the careers of so many of our prominent men are only useful for warning. As regards history, his greatness was narrowly provincial; but if the measure of deeds be the spirit in which they are done, that fidelity to instant duty, which, according to Herbert, makes an action fine, then his length of years

should be very precious to us for its lesson. Talleyrand, whose life may be compared with his for the strange vicissitudes which it witnessed, carried with him out of the world the respect of no man, least of all his own; and how many of our own public men have we seen whose old age but accumulated a disregard which they would gladly have exchanged for oblivion! In Quincy the public fidelity was loyal to the private, and the withdrawal of his old age was into a sanctuary—a diminution of publicity with addition of influence.

> "Conclude we, then, felicity consists
> Not in exterior fortunes. . . .
> Sacred felicity doth ne'er extend
> Beyond itself. . . .
> The swelling of an outward fortune can
> Create a prosperous, not a happy man."

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## *ABRAHAM LINCOLN.*

### 1864.

THERE have been many painful crises since the impatient vanity of South Carolina hurried ten prosperous Commonwealths into a crime whose assured retribution was to leave them either at the mercy of the nation they had wronged, or of the anarchy they had summoned but could not control, when no thoughtful American opened his morning paper without dreading to find that he had no longer a country to love and honour. Whatever the result of the convulsion whose first shocks were beginning to be felt, there would still be enough square miles of earth for elbow-room; but that ineffable sentiment made up of memory and hope, of instinct and tradition, which swells every man's heart and shapes his thought, though perhaps never present to his consciousness, would be gone from it, leaving it common earth and nothing more. Men might gather rich crops from it, but that ideal harvest of priceless associations would be reaped no longer: that fine virtue which sent up messages

of courage and security from every sod of it would have evaporated beyond recall. We should be irrevocably cut off from our past, and be forced to splice the ragged ends of our lives upon whatever new conditions chance might leave dangling for us.

We confess that we had our doubts at first whether the patriotism of our people were not too narrowly provincial to embrace the proportions of national peril. We felt an only too natural distrust of immense public meetings and enthusiastic cheers.

That a reaction should follow the holiday enthusiasm with which the war was entered on, that it should follow soon, and that the slackening of public spirit should be proportionate to the previous over-tension, might well be foreseen by all who had studied human nature or history. Men acting gregariously are always in extremes; as they are one moment capable of higher courage, so they are liable the next to baser depression, and it is often a matter of chance whether numbers shall multiply confidence or discouragement. Nor does deception lead more surely to distrust of men than self-deception to suspicion of principles. The only faith that wears well and holds its colour in all weather is that which is woven of conviction and set with the sharp mordant of experience. Enthusiasm is good material for the orator, but the statesman needs something more durable to work in; must be able to rely on the deliberate reason and consequent firmness of the people, without which that presence of mind, no less essential in times of moral than of material peril, will be wanting at the critical moment. Would this fervour of the Free States hold out? Was it kindled by a just feeling of the value of constitutional liberty? Had it body enough to withstand the inevitable dampening of checks, reverses, delays? Had our population intelligence to comprehend that the choice was between order and anarchy, between the equilibrium of a government by law and the tussle of misrule by *pronunciamiento*? Could a war be maintained without the ordinary stimulus of hatred and plunder, and with

the impersonal loyalty of principle? These were serious questions, and with no precedent to aid in answering them.

At the beginning of the war there was, indeed, occasion for the most anxious apprehension. A President known to be infected with the political heresies, and suspected of sympathy with the treason, of the Southern conspirators, had just surrendered the reins, we will not say of power, but of chaos, to a successor known only as the representative of a party whose leaders, with long training in opposition, had none in the conduct of affairs; an empty treasury was called on to supply resources beyond precedent in the history of finance; the trees were yet growing and the iron unmined with which a navy was to be built and armoured; officers without discipline were to make a mob into an army; and, above all, the public opinion of Europe, echoed and reinforced with every vague hint and every specious argument of despondency by a powerful faction at home, was either contemptuously sceptical or actively hostile. It would be hard to over-estimate the force of this latter element of disintegration and discouragement among a people where every citizen at home, and every soldier in the field, is a reader of newspapers. The pedlars of rumour in the North were the most effective allies of the rebellion. A nation can be liable to no more insidious treachery than that of the telegraph, sending hourly its electric thrill of panic along the remotest nerves of the community, till the excited imagination makes every real danger loom heightened with its unreal double.

And even if we look only at more palpable difficulties, the problem to be solved by our civil war was so vast, both in its immediate relations and its future consequences; the conditions of its solution were so intricate and so greatly dependent on incalculable and uncontrollable contingencies; so many of the data, whether for hope or fear, were, from their novelty, incapable of arrangement under any of the categories of historical precedent, that there were moments of crisis when the firmest believer in the strength and sufficiency of the democratic theory of government might

well hold his breath in vague apprehension of disaster. Our teachers of political philosophy, solemnly arguing from the precedent of some petty Grecian, Italian, or Flemish city, whose long periods of aristocracy were broken now and then by awkward parentheses of mob, had always taught us that democracies were incapable of the sentiment of loyalty, of concentrated and prolonged effort, of far-reaching conceptions; were absorbed in material interests; impatient of regular, and much more of exceptional restraint; had no natural nucleus of gravitation, nor any forces but centrifugal; were always on the verge of civil war, and slunk at last into the natural almshouse of bankrupt popular government, a military despotism Here was a dreary outlook for persons who knew democracy, not by rubbing shoulders with it lifelong, but merely from books, and America only by the report of some fellow-Briton, who, having eaten a bad dinner or lost a carpet-bag here, had written to the *Times* demanding redress, and drawing a mournful inference of democratic instability. Nor were men wanting among ourselves who had so steeped their brains in London literature as to mistake Cockneyism for European culture, and contempt of their country for cosmopolitan breadth of view, and who, owing all they had and all they were to democracy, thought it had an air of high breeding to join in the shallow epicedium that our bubble had burst.

But beside any disheartening influences which might affect the timid or the despondent, there were reasons enough of settled gravity against any over-confidence of hope. A war—which, whether we consider the expanse of the territory at stake, the hosts brought into the field, or the reach of the principles involved, may fairly be reckoned the most momentous of modern times—was to be waged by a people divided at home, unnerved by fifty years of peace, under a chief magistrate without experience and without reputation, whose every measure was sure to be cunningly hampered by a jealous and unscrupulous minority, and who, while dealing with unheard-of complications at home, must soothe a hostile neutrality abroad, waiting only a pretext to

become war. All this was to be done without warning and without preparation, while at the same time a social revolution was to be accomplished in the political condition of four millions of people, by softening the prejudices, allaying the fears, and gradually obtaining the co-operation of their unwilling liberators. Surely, if ever there were an occasion when the heightened imagination of the historian might see Destiny visibly intervening in human affairs, here was a knot worthy of her shears. Never, perhaps, was any system of government tried by so continuous and searching a strain as ours during the last three years; never has any shown itself stronger; and never could that strength be so directly traced to the virtue and intelligence of the people—to that general enlightenment and prompt efficiency of public opinion possible only under the influence of a political framework like our own. We find it hard to understand how even a foreigner should be blind to the grandeur of the combat of ideas that has been going on here—to the heroic energy, persistency, and self-reliance of a nation proving that it knows how much dearer greatness is than mere power; and we own that it is impossible for us to conceive the mental and moral condition of the American who does not feel his spirit braced and heightened by being even a spectator of such qualities and achievements. That a steady purpose and a definite aim have been given to the jarring forces which, at the beginning of the war, spent themselves in the discussion of schemes which could only become operative, if at all, after the war was over; that a popular excitement has been slowly intensified into an earnest national will; that a somewhat impracticable moral sentiment has been made the unconscious instrument of a practical moral end; that the treason of covert enemies, the jealousy of rivals, the unwise zeal of friends, have been made not only useless for mischief, but even useful for good; that the conscientious sensitiveness of England to the horrors of civil conflict has been prevented from complicating a domestic with a foreign war—all these results, any one of which might suffice to prove greatness in a ruler,

have been mainly due to the good sense, the good-humour, the sagacity, the large-mindedness, and the unselfish honesty of the unknown man whom a blind fortune, as it seemed, had lifted from the crowd to the most dangerous and difficult eminence of modern times. It is by presence of mind in untried emergencies that the native metal of a man is tested; it is by the sagacity to see, and the fearless honesty to admit, whatever of truth there may be in an adverse opinion, in order more convincingly to expose the fallacy that lurks behind it, that a reasoner at length gains for his mere statement of a fact the force of argument; it is by a wise forecast which allows hostile combinations to go so far as by the inevitable reaction to become elements of his own power, that a politician proves his genius for state-craft; and especially it is by so gently guiding public sentiment that he seems to follow it, by so yielding doubtful points that he can be firm without seeming obstinate in essential ones, and thus gain the advantages of compromise without the weakness of concession; by so instinctively comprehending the temper and prejudices of a people as to make them gradually conscious of the superior wisdom of his freedom from temper and prejudice—it is by qualities such as these that a magistrate shows himself worthy to be chief in a commonwealth of freemen. And it is for qualities such as these that we firmly believe History will rank Mr. Lincoln among the most prudent of statesmen and the most successful of rulers. If we wish to appreciate him, we have only to conceive the inevitable chaos in which we should now be weltering had a weak man or an unwise one been chosen in his stead.

"Bare is back," says the Norse proverb, "without brother behind it;" and this is, by analogy, true of an elective magistracy. The hereditary ruler in any critical emergency may reckon on the inexhaustible resources of *prestige*, of sentiment, of superstition, of dependent interest, while the new man must slowly and painfully create all these out of the unwilling material around him, by superiority of character, by patient singleness of

purpose, by sagacious presentiment of popular tendencies and instinctive sympathy with the national character. Mr. Lincoln's task was one of peculiar and exceptional difficulty. Long habit had accustomed the American people to the notion of a party in power, and of a President as its creature and organ, while the more vital fact, that the executive for the time being represents the abstract idea of government as a permanent principle superior to all party and all private interest, had gradually become unfamiliar. They had so long seen the public policy more or less directed by views of party, and often even of personal advantage, as to be ready to suspect the motives of a chief magistrate compelled, for the first time in our history, to feel himself the head and hand of a great nation, and to act upon the fundamental maxim, laid down by all publicists, that the first duty of the government is to defend and maintain its own existence. Accordingly, a powerful weapon seemed to be put into the hands of the Opposition by the necessity under which the administration found itself of applying this old truth to new relations. Nor were the Opposition his only nor his most dangerous opponents.

The Republicans had carried the country upon an issue in which ethics were more directly and visibly mingled with politics than usual. Their leaders were trained to a method of oratory which relied for its effect rather on the moral sense than the understanding. Their arrangements were drawn, not so much from experience as from general principles of right and wrong. When the war came, their system continued to be applicable and effective, for here again the reason of the people was to be reached and kindled through their sentiments. It was one of those periods of excitement, gathering, contagious, universal, which, while they last, exalt and clarify the minds of men, giving to the mere words *country*, *human rights*, *democracy*, a meaning and a force beyond that of sober and logical argument. They were convictions, maintained and defended by the supreme logic of passion. That

penetrating fire ran in and roused those primary instincts that make their lair in the dens and caverns of the mind. What is called the great popular heart was awakened, that indefinable something which may be, according to circumstances, the highest reason or the most brutish unreason. But enthusiasm, once cold, can never be warmed over into anything better than cant; and phrases, when once the inspiration that filled them with beneficent power has ebbed away, retain only that semblance of meaning which enables them to supplant reason in hasty minds. Among the lessons taught by the French Revolution there is none sadder or more striking than this, that you may make everything else out of the passions of men except a political system that will work, and that there is nothing so pitilessly and unconsciously cruel as sincerity formulated into dogma. It is always demoralising to extend the domain of sentiment over questions where it has no legitimate jurisdiction; and perhaps the severest strain upon Mr. Lincoln was in resisting a tendency of his own supporters which chimed with his own private desires, while wholly opposed to his convictions of what would be wise policy.

The change which three years have brought about is too remarkable to be passed over without comment, too weighty in its lesson not to be laid to heart. Never did a President enter upon office with less means at his command, outside his own strength of heart and steadiness of understanding, for inspiring confidence in the people, and so winning it for himself, than Mr. Lincoln. All that was known of him was that he was a good stump-speaker, nominated for his *availability*—that is, because he had no history—and chosen by a party with whose more extreme opinions he was not in sympathy. It might well be feared that a man past fifty, against whom the ingenuity of hostile partisans could rake up no accusation, must be lacking in manliness of character, in decision of principle, in strength of will; that a man who was at best only the representative of a party, and who yet did not fairly represent even that, would fail of political, much more of popular, support. And certainly

no one ever entered upon office with so few resources of power in the past, and so many materials of weakness in the present, as Mr. Lincoln. Even in that half of the Union which acknowledged him as President, there was a large and at that time dangerous minority, that hardly admitted his claim to the office, and even in the party that elected him there was also a large minority that suspected him of being secretly a communicant with the church of Laodicea. All that he did was sure to be virulently attacked as ultra by one side; all that he left undone, to be stigmatised as proof of lukewarmness and backsliding by the other. Meanwhile he was to carry on a truly colossal war by means of both; he was to disengage the country from diplomatic entanglements of unprecedented peril undisturbed by the help or the hindrance of either, and to win from the crowning dangers of his administration, in the confidence of the people, the means of his safety and their own. He has contrived to do it, and perhaps none of our Presidents since Washington has stood so firm in the confidence of the people as he does after three years of stormy administration.

Mr. Lincoln's policy was a tentative one, and rightly so. He laid down no programme which must compel him to be either inconsistent or unwise, no cast-iron theorem to which circumstances must be fitted as they rose, or else be useless to his ends. He seemed to have chosen Mazarin's motto, *Le temps et moi.* The *moi*, to be sure, was not very prominent at first, but it has grown more and more so, till the world is beginning to be persuaded that it stands for a character of marked individuality and capacity for affairs. Time was his prime minister, and, we began to think, at one period, his general-in-chief also. At first he was so slow that he tired out all those who see no evidence of progress but in blowing up the engine; then he was so fast that he took the breath away from those who think there is no getting on safely while there is a spark of fire under the boilers. God is the only being who has time enough; but a prudent man, who knows how to seize occasion, can

commonly make a shift to find as much as he needs. Mr. Lincoln, as it seems to us in reviewing his career, though we have sometimes in our impatience thought otherwise, has always waited, as a wise man should, till the right moment brought up all his reserves. *Semper nocuit differre paratis*, is a sound axiom, but the really efficacious man will also be sure to know when he is *not* ready, and be firm against all persuasion and reproach till he is.

One would be apt to think, from some of the criticisms made on Mr. Lincoln's course by those who mainly agree with him in principle, that the chief object of a statesman should be rather to proclaim his adhesion to certain doctrines than to achieve their triumph by quietly accomplishing his ends. In our opinion, there is no more unsafe politician than a conscientiously rigid *doctrinaire*, nothing more sure to end in disaster than a theoretic scheme of policy that admits of no pliability for contingencies. True, there is a popular image of an impossible He, in whose plastic hands the submissive destinies of mankind become as wax, and to whose commanding necessity the toughest facts yield with the graceful pliancy of fiction; but in real life we commonly find that the men who control circumstances, as it is called, are those who have learned to allow for the influence of their eddies, and have the nerve to turn them to account at the happy instant. Mr. Lincoln's perilous task has been to carry a rather shaky raft through the rapids, making fast the unrulier logs as he could snatch opportunity, and the country is to be congratulated that he did not think it his duty to run straight at all hazards, but cautiously to assure himself with his setting-pole where the main current was, and keep steadily to that. He is still in wild water, but we have faith that his skill and sureness of eye will bring him out right at last.

A curious, and, as we think, not inapt parallel, might be drawn between Mr. Lincoln and one of the most striking figures in modern history—Henry IV. of France. The career of the latter may be more picturesque, as that of a daring captain always is; but in all its vicissitudes there is

nothing more romantic than that sudden change, as by a rub of Aladdin's lamp, from the attorney's office in a country town of Illinois to the helm of a great nation in times like these. The analogy between the characters and circumstances of the two men is in many respects singularly close. Succeeding to a rebellion rather than a crown, Henry's chief material dependence was the Huguenot party, whose doctrines sat upon him with a looseness distasteful certainly, if not suspicious, to the more fanatical among them. King only in name over the greater part of France, and with his capital barred against him, it yet gradually became clear to the more far-seeing even of the Catholic party, that he was the only centre of order and legitimate authority round which France could reorganise itself. While preachers who held the divine right of kings made the churches of Paris ring with declamations in favour of democracy rather than submit to the heretic dog of a Béarnois—much as our *soi-disant* Democrats have lately been preaching the divine right of slavery, and denouncing the heresies of the Declaration of Independence —Henry bore both parties in hand till he was convinced that only one course of action could possibly combine his own interests and those of France. Meanwhile the Protestants believed somewhat doubtfully that he was theirs, the Catholics hoped somewhat doubtfully that he would be theirs, and Henry himself turned aside remonstrance, advice, and curiosity alike with a jest or a proverb (if a little *high*, he liked them none the worse), joking continually as his manner was. We have seen Mr. Lincoln contemptuously compared to Sancho Panza by persons incapable of appreciating one of the deepest pieces of wisdom in the profoundest romance ever written; namely, that, while Don Quixote was incomparable in theoretic and ideal statesmanship, Sancho, with his stock of proverbs, the ready money of human experience, made the best possible practical governor. Henry IV. was as full of wise saws and modern instances as Mr. Lincoln, but beneath all this was the thoughtful, practical, humane, and thoroughly

earnest man, around whom the fragments of France were to gather themselves till she took her place again as a planet of the first magnitude in the European system. In one respect Mr. Lincoln was more fortunate than Henry. However some may think him wanting in zeal, the most fanatical can find no taint of apostasy in any measure of his, nor can the most bitter charge him with being influenced by motives of personal interest. The leading distinction between the policies of the two is one of circumstances. Henry went over to the nation; Mr. Lincoln has steadily drawn the nation over to him. One left a united France; the other, we hope and believe, will leave a reunited America. We leave our readers to trace the further points of difference and resemblance for themselves, merely suggesting a general similarity which has often occurred to us. One only point of melancholy interest we will allow ourselves to touch upon. That Mr. Lincoln is not handsome nor elegant, we learn from certain English tourists who would consider similar revelations in regard to Queen Victoria as thoroughly American in their want of *bienséance*. It is no concern of ours, nor does it affect his fitness for the high place he so worthily occupies; but he is certainly as fortunate as Henry in the matter of good looks, if we may trust contemporary evidence. Mr. Lincoln has also been reproached with Americanism by some not unfriendly British critics; but, with all deference, we cannot say that we like him any the worse for it, or see in it any reason why he should govern Americans the less wisely.

People of more sensitive organisations may be shocked, but we are glad that in this our true war of independence, which is to free us for ever from the Old World, we have had at the head of our affairs a man whom America made, as God made Adam, out of the very earth, unancestried, unprivileged, unknown, to show us how much truth, how much magnanimity, and how much statecraft await the call of opportunity in simple manhood when it believes in the justice of God and the worth of man. Conventionalities are all very well in their proper place, but they shrivel at

the touch of nature like stubble in the fire. The genius that sways a nation by its arbitrary will seems less august to us than that which multiplies and reinforces itself in the instincts and convictions of an entire people. Autocracy may have something in it more melodramatic than this, but falls far short of it in human value and interest.

Experience would have bred in us a rooted distrust of improvised statesmanship, even if we did not believe politics to be a science, which, if it cannot always command men of special aptitude and great powers, at least demands the long and steady application of the best powers of such men as it can command to master even its first principles. It is curious that, in a country which boasts of its intelligence, the theory should be so generally held that the most complicated of human contrivances, and one which every day becomes more complicated, can be worked at sight by any man able to talk for an hour or two without stopping to think.

Mr. Lincoln is sometimes claimed as an example of a ready-made ruler. But no case could well be less in point; for, besides that he was a man of such fair-mindedness as is always the raw material of wisdom, he had in his profession a training precisely the opposite of that to which a partisan is subjected. His experience as a lawyer compelled him not only to see that there is a principle underlying every phenomenon in human affairs, but that there are always two sides to every question, both of which must be fully understood in order to understand either, and that it is of greater advantage to an advocate to appreciate the strength than the weakness of his antagonist's position. Nothing is more remarkable than the unerring tact with which, in his debate with Mr. Douglas, he went straight to the reason of the question; nor have we ever had a more striking lesson in political tactics than the fact, that, opposed to a man exceptionally adroit in using popular prejudice and bigotry to his purpose, exceptionally unscrupulous in appealing to those baser motives that turn a meeting of citizens into a mob of barbarians, he should yet have won his case before a jury of

the people. Mr. Lincoln was as far as possible from an impromptu politician. His wisdom was made up of a knowledge of things as well as of men; his sagacity resulted from a clear perception and honest acknowledgment of difficulties, which enabled him to see that the only durable triumph of political opinion is based, not on any abstract right, but upon so much of justice, the highest attainable at any given moment in human affairs, as may be had in the balance of mutual concession. Doubtless he had an ideal, but it was the ideal of a practical statesman—to aim at the best, and to take the next best, if he is lucky enough to get even that. His slow, but singularly masculine, intelligence taught him that precedent is only another name for embodied experience, and that it counts for even more in the guidance of communities of men than in that of the individual life. He was not a man who held it good public economy to pull down on the mere chance of rebuilding better. Mr. Lincoln's faith in God was qualified by a very well-founded distrust of the wisdom of man. Perhaps it was his want of self-confidence that more than anything else won him the unlimited confidence of the people, for they felt that there would be no need of retreat from any position he had deliberately taken. The cautious, but steady, advance of his policy during the war was like that of a Roman army. He left behind him a firm road on which public confidence could follow; he took America with him where he went; what he gained he occupied, and his advanced posts became colonies. The very homeliness of his genius was its distinction. His kingship was conspicuous by its workday homespun. Never was ruler so absolute as he, nor so little conscious of it; for he was the incarnate common-sense of the people. With all that tenderness of nature whose sweet sadness touched whoever saw him with something of its own pathos, there was no trace of sentimentalism in his speech or action. He seems to have had but one rule of conduct, always that of practical and successful politics, to let himself be guided by events, when they were sure to bring him out where he wished

to go, though by what seemed to unpractical minds, which let go the possible to grasp at the desirable, a longer road.

Undoubtedly the highest function of statesmanship is by degrees to accommodate the conduct of communities to ethical laws, and to subordinate the conflicting self-interests of the day to higher and more permanent concerns. But it is on the understanding, and not on the sentiment, of a nation that all safe legislation must be based. Voltaire's saying, that "a consideration of petty circumstances is the tomb of great things," may be true of individual men, but it certainly is not true of governments. It is by a multitude of such considerations, each in itself trifling, but all together weighty, that the framers of policy can alone divine what is practicable, and therefore wise. The imputation of inconsistency is one to which every sound politician and every honest thinker must sooner or later subject himself. The foolish and the dead alone never change their opinion. The course of a great statesman resembles that of navigable rivers, avoiding immovable obstacles with noble bends of concession, seeking the broad levels of opinion on which men soonest settle and longest dwell, following and marking the almost imperceptible slopes of national tendency, yet always aiming at direct advances, always recruited from sources nearer heaven, and sometimes bursting open paths of progress and fruitful human commerce through what seem the eternal barriers of both. It is loyalty to great ends, even though forced to combine the small and opposing motives of selfish men to accomplish them; it is the anchored cling to solid principles of duty and action, which knows how to swing with the tide, but is never carried away by it—that we demand in public men, and not sameness of policy, or a conscientious persistency in what is impracticable. For the impracticable, however theoretically enticing, is always politically unwise, sound statesmanship being the application of that prudence to the public business which is the safest guide in that of private men.

No doubt slavery was the most delicate and embarrassing

question with which Mr. Lincoln was called on to deal, and it was one which no man in his position, whatever his opinions, could evade: for, though he might withstand the clamour of partisans, he must sooner or later yield to the persistent importunacy of circumstances, which thrust the problem upon him at every turn and in every shape.

It has been brought against us as an accusation abroad, and repeated here by people who measure their country rather by what is thought of it than by what it is, that our war has not been distinctly and avowedly for the extinction of slavery, but a war rather for the preservation of our national power and greatness, in which the emancipation of the negro has been forced upon us by circumstances and accepted as a necessity. We are very far from denying this; nay, we admit that it is so far true that we were slow to renounce our constitutional obligations even toward those who had absolved us by their own act from the letter of our duty. We are speaking of the government which, legally installed for the whole country, was bound, so long as it was possible, not to overstep the limits of orderly prescription, and could not, without abnegating its own very nature, take the lead in making rebellion an excuse for revolution. There were, no doubt, many ardent and sincere persons who seemed to think this as simple a thing to do as to lead off a Virginia reel. They forgot what should be forgotten least of all in a system like ours, that the administration for the time being represents not only the majority which elects it, but the minority as well—a minority in this case powerful, and so little ready for emancipation that it was opposed even to war. Mr. Lincoln had not been chosen as general agent of an anti-slavery society, but President of the United States, to perform certain functions exactly defined by law. Whatever were his wishes, it was no less duty than policy to mark out for himself a line of action that would not further distract the country, by raising before their time questions which plainly would soon enough compel attention, and for which every day was making the answer more easy.

Meanwhile he must solve the riddle of this new Sphinx, or be devoured. Though Mr. Lincoln's policy in this critical affair has not been such as to satisfy those who demand an heroic treatment for even the most trifling occasion, and who will not cut their coat according to their cloth, unless they can borrow the scissors of Atropos, it has been at least not unworthy of the long-headed king of Ithaca. Mr. Lincoln had the choice of Bassanio offered him. Which of the three caskets held the prize that was to redeem the fortunes of the country? There was the golden one, whose showy speciousness might have tempted a vain man; the silver of compromise, which might have decided the choice of a merely acute one; and the leaden—dull and homely-looking, as prudence always is, yet with something about it sure to attract the eye of practical wisdom. Mr. Lincoln dallied with his decision perhaps longer than seemed needful to those on whom its awful responsibility was not to rest, but when he made it, it was worthy of his cautious but sure-footed understanding. The moral of the Sphinx-riddle, and it is a deep one, lies in the childish simplicity of the solution. Those who fail in guessing it, fail because they are over-ingenious, and cast about for an answer that shall suit their own notion of the gravity of the occasion and of their own dignity, rather than the occasion itself.

In a matter which must be finally settled by public opinion, and in regard to which the ferment of prejudice and passion on both sides has not yet subsided to that equilibrium of compromise from which alone a sound public opinion can result, it is proper enough for the private citizen to press his own convictions with all possible force of argument and persuasion; but the popular magistrate, whose judgment must become action, and whose action involves the whole country, is bound to wait till the sentiment of the people is so far advanced toward his own point of view, that what he does shall find support in it, instead of merely confusing it with new elements of division. It was not unnatural that men earnestly devoted to the saving of their country, and profoundly convinced that slavery

was its only real enemy, should demand a decided policy round which all patriots might rally; and this might have been the wisest course for an absolute ruler. But in the then unsettled state of the public mind, with a large party decrying even resistance to the slaveholders' rebellion as not only unwise, but even unlawful; with a majority, perhaps, even of the would-be loyal so long accustomed to regard the Constitution as a deed of gift conveying to the South their own judgment as to policy and instinct as to right, that they were in doubt at first whether their loyalty were due to the country or to slavery; and with a respectable body of honest and influential men who still believed in the possibility of conciliation,—Mr. Lincoln judged wisely, that, in laying down a policy in deference to one party, he should be giving to the other the very fulcrum for which their disloyalty had been waiting.

It behoved a clear-headed man in his position not to yield so far to an honest indignation against the brokers of treason in the North as to lose sight of the materials for misleading which were their stock in trade, and to forget that it is not the falsehood of sophistry which is to be feared, but the grain of truth mingled with it to make it specious,—that it is not the knavery of the leaders so much as the honesty of the followers they may seduce, that gives them power for evil. It was especially his duty to do nothing which might help the people to forget the true cause of the war in fruitless disputes about its inevitable consequences.

The doctrine of State rights can be so handled by an adroit demagogue as easily to confound the distinction between liberty and lawlessness in the minds of ignorant persons, accustomed always to be influenced by the sound of certain words, rather than to reflect upon the principles which give them meaning. For, though Secession involves the manifest absurdity of denying to a State the right of making war against any foreign Power while permitting it against the United States; though it supposes a compact of mutual concessions and guaranties among States without any arbiter in case of dissension; though it contradicts

common-sense in assuming that the men who framed our government did not know what they meant when they substituted Union for Confederation; though it falsifies history, which shows that the main opposition to the adoption of the Constitution was based on the argument that it did not allow that independence in the several States which alone would justify them in seceding;—yet, as slavery was universally admitted to be a reserved right, an inference could be drawn from any direct attack upon it (though only in self-defence) to a natural right of resistance, logical enough to satisfy minds untrained to detect fallacy, as the majority of men always are, and now too much disturbed by the disorder of the times to consider that the order of events had any legitimate bearing on the argument. Though Mr. Lincoln was too sagacious to give the Northern allies of the Rebels the occasion they desired and even strove to provoke, yet from the beginning of the war the most persistent efforts have been made to confuse the public mind as to its origin and motives, and to drag the people of the loyal States down from the national position they had instinctively taken to the old level of party squabbles and antipathies. The wholly unprovoked rebellion of an oligarchy proclaiming negro slavery the corner-stone of free institutions, and in the first flush of over-hasty confidence venturing to parade the logical sequence of their leading dogma, "that slavery is right in principle, and has nothing to do with difference of complexion," has been represented as a legitimate and gallant attempt to maintain the true principles of democracy. The rightful endeavour of an established government, the least onerous that ever existed, to defend itself against a treacherous attack on its very existence, has been cunningly made to seem the wicked effort of a fanatical clique to force its doctrines on an oppressed population.

Even so long ago as when Mr. Lincoln, not yet convinced of the danger and magnitude of the crisis, was endeavouring to persuade himself of Union majorities at the South, and to carry on a war that was half peace in the hope of a peace

that would have been all war,—while he was still enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law, under some theory that Secession, however it might absolve States from their obligations, could not escheat them of their claims under the Constitution, and that slaveholders in rebellion had alone among mortals the privilege of having their cake and eating it at the same time—the enemies of free government were striving to persuade the people that the war was an Abolition crusade. To rebel without reason was proclaimed as one of the rights of man, while it was carefully kept out of sight that to suppress rebellion is the first duty of government. All the evils that have come upon the country have been attributed to the Abolitionists, though it is hard to see how any party can become permanently powerful except in one of two ways,—either by the greater truth of its principles, or the extravagance of the party opposed to it. To fancy the ship of state, riding safe at her constitutional moorings, suddenly engulfed by a huge kraken of Abolitionism, rising from unknown depths and grasping it with slimy tentacles, is to look at the natural history of the matter with the eyes of Pontoppidan. To believe that the leaders in the Southern treason feared any danger from Abolitionism, would be to deny them ordinary intelligence, though there can be little doubt that they made use of it to stir the passions and excite the fears of their deluded accomplices. They rebelled, not because they thought slavery weak, but because they believed it strong enough, not to overthrow the government, but to get possession of it; for it becomes daily clearer that they used rebellion only as a means of revolution; and if they got revolution, though not in the shape they looked for, is the American people to save them from its consequences at the cost of its own existence? The election of Mr. Lincoln, which it was clearly in their power to prevent had they wished, was the occasion merely, and not the cause, of their revolt. Abolitionism, till within a year or two, was the despised heresy of a few earnest persons, without political weight enough to carry the election of a parish constable;

and their cardinal principle was disunion, because they were convinced that within the Union the position of slavery was impregnable. In spite of the proverb, great effects do not follow from small causes—that is, disproportionately small—but from adequate causes acting under certain required conditions. To contrast the size of the oak with that of the parent acorn, as if the poor seed had paid all costs from its slender strong-box, may serve for a child's wonder; but the real miracle lies in that divine league which bound all the forces of nature to the service of the tiny germ in fulfilling its destiny. Everything has been at work for the past ten years in the cause of anti-slavery, but Garrison and Phillips have been far less successful propagandists than the slave-holders themselves, with the constantly-growing arrogance of their pretensions and encroachments. They have forced the question upon the attention of every voter in the Free States, by defiantly putting freedom and democracy on the defensive. But, even after the Kansas outrages, there was no wide-spread desire on the part of the North to commit aggressions, though there was a growing determination to resist them. The popular unanimity in favour of the war three years ago was but in small measure the result of anti-slavery sentiment, far less of any zeal for abolition. But every month of the war, every movement of the allies of slavery in the Free States, has been making Abolitionists by the thousand. The masses of any people, however intelligent, are very little moved by abstract principles of humanity and justice, until those principles are interpreted for them by the stinging commentary of some infringement upon their own rights, and then their instincts and passions, once aroused, do indeed derive an incalculable reinforcement of impulse and intensity from those higher ideas, those sublime traditions, which have no motive political force till they are allied with a sense of immediate personal wrong or imminent peril. Then at last the stars in their courses begin to fight against Sisera. Had anyone doubted before that the rights of human nature are unitary, that oppression is

of one hue the world over, no matter what the colour of the oppressed—had any one failed to see what the real essence of the contest was—the efforts of the advocates of slavery among ourselves to throw discredit upon the fundamental axioms of the Declaration of Independence and the radical doctrines of Christianity, could not fail to sharpen his eyes.

While every day was bringing the people nearer to the conclusion which all thinking men saw to be inevitable from the beginning, it was wise in Mr. Lincoln to leave the shaping of his policy to events. In this country, where the rough and ready understanding of the people is sure at last to be the controlling power, a profound common-sense is the best genius for statesmanship. Hitherto the wisdom of the President's measures has been justified by the fact that they have always resulted in more firmly uniting public opinion. One of the things particularly admirable in the public utterances of President Lincoln is a certain tone of familiar dignity, which, while it is perhaps the most difficult attainment of mere style, is also no doubtful indication of personal character. There must be something essentially noble in an elective ruler who can descend to the level of confidential ease without losing respect, something very manly in one who can break through the etiquette of his conventional rank and trust himself to the reason and intelligence of those who have elected him. No higher compliment was ever paid to a nation than the simple confidence, the fireside plainness, with which Mr. Lincoln always addresses himself to the reason of the American people. This was, indeed, a true democrat, who grounded himself on the assumption that a democracy can think. "Come, let us reason together about this matter," has been the tone of all his addresses to the people; and accordingly we have never had a chief magistrate who so won to himself the love and at the same time the judgment of his countrymen. To us, that simple confidence of his in the right-mindedness of his fellow-men is very touching, and its success is as strong an argument as we have ever seen in favour of the theory that

men can govern themselves. He never appeals to any vulgar sentiment, he never alludes to the humbleness of his origin; it probably never occurred to him, indeed, that there was anything higher to start from than manhood; and he put himself on a level with those he addressed, not by going down to them, but only by taking it for granted that they had brains, and would come up to a common ground of reason. In an article lately printed in *The Nation*, Mr. Bayard Taylor mentions the striking fact, that in the foulest dens of the Five Points he found the portrait of Lincoln. The wretched population that makes its hive there threw all its votes and more against him, and yet paid this instinctive tribute to the sweet humanity of his nature. Their ignorance sold its vote and took its money, but all that was left of manhood in them recognised its saint and martyr.

Mr. Lincoln is not in the habit of saying "This is *my* opinion, or *my* theory," but "This is the conclusion to which, in my judgment, the time has come, and to which, accordingly, the sooner we come the better for us." His policy has been the policy of public opinion based on adequate discussion and on a timely recognition of the influence of passing events in shaping the features of events to come.

One secret of Mr. Lincoln's remarkable success in captivating the popular mind is undoubtedly an unconsciousness of self which enables him, though under the necessity of constantly using the capital *I*, to do it without any suggestion of egotism. There is no single vowel which men's mouths can pronounce with such difference of effect. That which one shall hide away, as it were, behind the substance of his discourse, or, if he bring it to the front, shall use merely to give an agreeable accent of individuality to what he says, another shall make an offensive challenge to the self-satisfaction of all his hearers, and an unwarranted intrusion upon each man's sense of personal importance, irritating every pore of his vanity, like a dry north-east wind, to a gooseflesh of opposition and hostility. Mr.

Lincoln has never studied Quinctilian; but he has, in the earnest simplicity and unaffected Americanism of his own character, one art of oratory worth all the rest. He forgets himself so entirely in his object as to give his *I* the sympathetic and persuasive effect of *We* with the great body of his countrymen. Homely, dispassionate, showing all the rough-edged process of his thought as it goes along, yet arriving at his conclusions with an honest every-day logic, he is so eminently our representative man, that, when he speaks, it seems as if the people were listening to their own thinking aloud. The dignity of his thought owes nothing to any ceremonial garb of words, but to the manly movement that comes of settled purpose and an energy of reason that knows not what rhetoric means. There has been nothing of Cleon, still less of Strepsiades striving to underbid him in demagogism, to be found in the public utterances of Mr. Lincoln. He has always addressed the intelligence of men, never their prejudice, their passion, or their ignorance.

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On the day of his death, this simple Western attorney, who according to one party was a vulgar joker, and whom the *doctrinaires* among his own supporters accused of wanting every element of statesmanship, was the most absolute ruler in Christendom, and this solely by the hold his good-humoured sagacity had laid on the hearts and understandings of his countrymen. Nor was this all, for it appeared that he had drawn the great majority, not only of his fellow-citizens, but of mankind also, to his side. So strong and so persuasive is honest manliness without a single quality of romance or unreal sentiment to help it! A civilian during times of the most captivating military achievement, awkward, with no skill in the lower technicalities of manners, he left behind him a fame beyond that of any conqueror, the memory of a grace higher than that of outward person, and of a gentlemanliness deeper than mere breeding. Never before that startled April morning did such multitudes of men shed tears for the death of one they had never seen, as if with him a friendly presence had

been taken away from their lives, leaving them colder and darker. Never was funeral panegyric so eloquent as the silent look of sympathy which strangers exchanged when they met on that day. Their common manhood had lost a kinsman.

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## *THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF JAMES GATES PERCIVAL.*

This is an interesting and in many respects instructive book. Mr. Ward has done his work, as is fitting, in a loving spirit; and if he over-estimates both what Percival was and what he did, he enables us to form our own judgment by letting him so far as possible speak for himself. The book gives a rather curious picture of what the life of a man of letters is likely to be in a country not yet ripe for literary production, especially if he be not endowed with the higher qualities which command and can wait for that best of all successes which comes slowly. In a generation where everybody can write verses, and where certain modes of thought and turns of phrase have become so tyrannous that it is as hard to distinguish between the productions of one minor poet and another as among those of so many Minnesingers or Troubadours there is a demand for only two things—for what chimes with the moment's whim of popular sentiment and is forgotten when that has changed, or for what is never an anachronism, because it slakes or seems to slake the eternal thirst of our nature for those ideal waters that glimmer before us and still before us in ever-renewing mirage. Percival met neither of these conditions. With a nature singularly unplastic, unsympathetic, and self-involved, he was incapable of receiving into his own mind the ordinary emotions of men and giving them back in music; and with a lofty conception of the object and purposes of poesy, he had neither the resolution nor the power which might have enabled him to realise it. He offers as striking an example as could be found of the

poetic temperament unballasted with those less obvious qualities which make the poetic faculty. His verse carries every inch of canvas that diction and sentiment can crowd, but the craft is cranky, and we miss that deep-grasping keel of reason which alone can steady and give direction. His mind drifts, too waterlogged to answer the helm, and in his longer poems, like "Prometheus," half the voyage is spent in trying to make up for a lee-way which becomes at last irretrievable. If he had a port in view when he set out, he seems soon to give up all hope of ever reaching it; and whenever we open the log-book, we find him running for nowhere in particular, as the wind happens to lead, or lying-to in the merest gale of verbiage. The truth is, that Percival was led to the writing of verse by a sentimental desire of the mind, and not by that concurring instinct of all the faculties which is a self-forgetting passion of the entire man. Too excitable to possess his subject fully, as a man of mere talent may often do, he is not possessed by it as the man of genius is, and seems helplessly striving, the greater part of the time, to make out what, in the name of common or uncommon sense, he is after. With all the stock properties of verse whirling and dancing about his ears puffed out to an empty show of life, the reader of much of his blank verse feels as if a mob of well-draperied clothes-lines were rioting about him in all the unwilling ecstasy of a thunder-gust.

Percival living from 1795 to 1856, arrived at manhood just as the last war with England had come to end. Poor, shy, and proud, there is nothing in his earlier years that might not be paralleled in those of hundreds of sensitive boys who gradually get the nonsense shaken out of them in the rough school of life. The length of the schooling needful in his case is what makes it peculiar. Not till after he was fifty, if even then, did he learn that the world never takes a man at his own valuation, and never pays money for what it does not want, or think it wants. It did not want his poetry, simply because it was not, is not, and by no conceivable power of argument can be made, interesting

—the first duty of every artistic product. Percival, who would have thought his neighbours mad if they had insisted on his buying twenty thousand refrigerators merely because they had been at the trouble of making them, and found it convenient to turn them into cash, could never forgive the world for taking this business view of the matter in his own case. He went on doggedly, making refrigerators of every possible pattern, and comforted himself with the thought of a wiser posterity, which should have learned that the purpose of poetry is to cool and not to kindle. His "Mind," which is on the whole perhaps the best of his writings, vies in coldness with the writings of his brother doctor, Akenside, whose "Pleasures of Imagination" are something quite other than pleasing in reality. If there be here and there a semblance of pale fire, it is but the reflection of moonshine upon ice. Akenside is respectable, because he really had something new to say, in spite of his pompous, mouthing way of saying it; but when Percival says it over again, it is a little too much. In his more ambitious pieces—and it is curious how literally the word "pieces" applies to all he did—he devotes himself mainly to telling us what poetry ought to be, as if mankind were not always more than satisfied with anyone who fulfils the true office of poet, by showing them, with the least possible fuss, what it is. Percival was a professor of poetry rather than a poet, and we are not surprised at the number of lectures he reads us when we learn that in early life he was an excellent demonstrator of anatomy, whose subject must be dead before his business with it begins. His interest in poetry was always more or less scientific. He was for ever trying experiments in matter and form, especially the latter. And these were especially unhappy, because it is plain that he had no musical ear, or at best a very imperfect one. His attempts at classical metres are simply unreadable, whether as verse or prose. He contrives to make even the Sapphic so, which when we read it in Latin moves featly to our modern accentuation. Let anyone who wishes to feel the difference between ear and no

ear compare Percival's specimens with those in the same kind of Coleridge, who had the finest metrical sense since Milton. We take this very experimenting to be a sufficient proof that Percival's faculty, such as it was—and we do not rate it highly—was artificial, and not innate. The true poet is much rather experimented upon by life and nature, by joy and sorrow, by beauty and defect, till it be found out whether he have any hidden music in him that can sing them into an accord with the eternal harmony which we call God.

It is easy to trace the literary influences to which the mind of Percival was in turn subjected. Early in life we find a taint of Byronism, which indeed does not wholly disappear to the last. There is among his poems "An Imprecation," of which a single stanza will suffice as a specimen:—

> "Wrapped in sheets of gory lightning,
> While cursed night-hags ring thy knell,
> May the arm of vengeance bright'ning,
> O'er thee wave the sword of hell!"

If we could fancy Laura Matilda shut up tipsy in the watch-house, we might suppose her capable of this melodious substitute for swearing. We confess that we cannot read it without laughing, after learning from Mr. Ward that its Salmoneus-thunderbolts were launched at the comfortable little city of Hartford, because the poet fancied that the inhabitants thereof did not like him or his verses so much as he himself did. There is something deliciously ludicrous in the conception of night-hags ringing the orthodox bell of the Second Congregational or First Baptist Meeting-house to summon the parishioners to witness these fatal consequences of not reading Percival's poems. Nothing less than the fear of some such catastrophe could compel the perusal of the greater part of them. Next to Byron comes Moore, whose cloying sentimentalism and too facile melody are recalled by the subject and treatment of very many of the shorter lyrics of Percival. In "Prometheus" it is Shelley who is

paramount for the time, and Shelley at his worst period, before his unwieldy abundance of incoherent words and images, that were merely words and images without any meaning of real experience to give them solidity, had been compressed in the stricter moulds of thought and study. In the blank verse, again, we encounter Wordsworth's tone and sentiment. These were no good models for Percival, who always improvised, and who seems to have thought verse the great distinction between poetry and prose. Percival got nothing from Shelley but the fatal copiousness which is his vice, nothing from Wordsworth but that tendency to preach at every corner about a sympathy with nature which is not his real distinction, and which becomes a wearisome cant at second-hand. Shelley and Wordsworth are both stilted, though in different ways. Shelley wreathed his stilts with flowers; while Wordsworth, protesting against the use of them as sinful, mounts his solemnly at last, and stalks away, conscientiously eschewing whatever would serve to hide the naked wood—nay, was it not Gray's only that were scandalous, and were not his own, modelled upon those of the sainted Cowper, of strictly orthodox pattern after all? Percival, like all imitators, is caught by the defects of what he copies, and exaggerates them. With him the stilts are the chief matter; and getting a taller pair than either of his predecessors, he lifts his commonplace upon them only to make it more drearily conspicuous. Shelley has his gleams of unearthly wildfire; Wordsworth is by fits the most deeply-inspired man of his generation; but Percival has no lucid interval. He is pertinaciously and unappeasably dull—as dull as a comedy of Goethe. He never in his life wrote a rememberable verse. We should not have thought this of any consequence now, for we need not try to read him, did not Mr. Ward with amusing gravity all along assume that he was a great poet. There was scarce timber enough in him for the making of a Tiedge or a Hagedorn, both of whom he somewhat resembles.

Percival came to maturity at an unfortunate time for a

man so liable to self-delusion. Leaving college with so imperfect a classical training (in spite of the numerous "testimonials" cited by Mr. Ward) that he was capable of laying the accent on the second syllable of Pericles, he seems never to have systematically trained even such faculty as was in him, but to have gone on to the end mistaking excitability of brain for wholesome exercise of thought. The consequence is a prolonged immaturity, which makes his latest volume, published in 1843, as crude and as plainly wanting in enduring quality as the first number of his "Clio." We have the same old complaints of neglected genius—as if genius could ever be neglected so long as it has the perennial consolation of its own divine society—the same wilted sentiment, the same feeling about for topics of verse in which he may possibly find that inspiration from without which the true poet cannot flee from in himself. These tedious wailings about heavenly powers suffocating in the heavy atmosphere of an uncongenial, unrecognising world—and Percival is profuse of them—are simply an advertisement to whoever has ears of some innate disability in the man who utters them. Heavenly powers know very well how to take care of themselves. The poor "World," meaning thereby that small fraction of society which has any personal knowledge of an author or his affairs, has had great wrong done it in such matters. It is not, and never was, the powers of a man that it neglects—it could not if it would—but his weakness, and especially the publication of them, of which it grows weary. It can never supply any man with what is wanting in himself, and the attempt to do it only makes bad worse. If a man can find the proof of his own genius only in public appreciation—still worse, if his vanity console itself with taking it as an evidence of rare qualities in himself that his fellow-mortals are unable to see them—it is all up with him. The "World" resolutely refused to find Wordsworth entertaining, and it refuses still, on good grounds; but the genius that was in him bore up unflinchingly, would take no denial, got its claim admitted on all hands, and impregnated at last the

literature of an entire generation, though *habitans in sicco*, if ever genius did. But Percival seems to have satisfied himself with a syllogism something like this: Men of genius are neglected; the more neglect, the more genius; I am altogether neglected—*ergo*, wholly made up of that priceless material.

The truth was that he suffered rather from over-appreciation; and "when," says a nameless old Frenchman, "I see a man go up like a rocket, I expect before long to see the stick come down." The times were singularly propitious to mediocrity. As in Holland one had only to

"Invent a shovel and be a magistrate,"

so here to write a hundred blank verses was to be immortal, till somebody else wrote a hundred and fifty blanker ones. It had been resolved unanimously that we must and would have a national literature. England, France, Spain, Italy, each already had one, Germany was getting one made as fast as possible, and Ireland vowed that she once had one far surpassing them all. To be respectable, we must have one also, and that speedily. That we were not yet, in any true sense, a nation; that we wanted that literary and social atmosphere which is the breath of life to all artistic production; that our scholarship, such as it was, was mostly of that theological sort which acts like a prolonged drought upon the brain; that our poetic fathers were Joel Barlow and Timothy Dwight—was nothing to the purpose; a literature adapted to the size of the country was what we must and would have. Given the number of square miles, the length of the rivers, the size of the lakes, and you have the greatness of the literature we were bound to produce without further delay. If that little dribble of an Avon had succeeded in engendering Shakespeare, what a giant might we not look for from the mighty womb of Mississippi! Physical geography for the first time took her rightful place as the tenth and most inspiring Muse. A glance at the map would satisfy the most incredulous that she had done her best for us, and should we be wanting to

the glorious opportunity? Not we indeed! So surely as Franklin invented the art of printing, and Fulton the steam-engine, we would invent us a great poet in time to send the news by the next packet to England, and teach her that we were her masters in arts as well as arms.

Percival was only too ready to be invented, and he forthwith produced his bale of verses from a loom capable of turning off a hitherto unheard-of number of yards to the hour, and perfectly adapted to the amplitude of our territory, inasmuch as it was manufactured on the theory of covering the largest surface with the least possible amount of meaning that would hold words together. He was as ready to accept the perilous emprise, and as loud in asserting his claim thereto, as Sir Kay used to be, and with much the same result. Our critical journals—and America certainly *has* led the world in a department of letters which of course requires no outfit but the power to read and write, gratuitously furnished by our public schools—received him with a shout of welcome. Here came the true deliverer at last, mounted on a steed to which he himself had given the new name of "Pegāsus,"—for we were to be original in everything—and certainly blowing his own trumpet with remarkable vigour of lungs. Solitary enthusiasts who had long awaited this sublime avatar, addressed him in sonnets which he accepted with a gravity beyond all praise. (To be sure, even Mr Ward seems to allow that his sense of humour was hardly equal to his other transcendent endowments.) His path was strewn with laurel—of the native variety, altogether superior to that of the Old World, at any rate not precisely like it. Verses signed "P.," as like each other as two peas, and as much like poetry as that vegetable is like a peach, were watched for in the corner of a newspaper as an astronomer watches for a new planet. There was never anything so comically unreal since the crowning in the Capitol of Messer Francesco Petrarca, Grand Sentimentalist in Ordinary at the Court of King Robert of Naples. Unhappily, Percival took it all quite seriously. There was no praise too ample for the easy elasticity of his swallow.

He believed himself as gigantic as the shadow he cast on these rolling mists of insubstantial adulation, and life-long he could never make out why *his* fine words refused to butter his parsnips for him, nay, to furnish both parsnips and sauce. While the critics were debating precisely how many of the prime qualities of the great poets of his own and preceding generations he combined in his single genius, and in what particular respects he surpassed them all—a point about which he himself seems never to have had any doubts—the public, which could read Scott and Byron with avidity, and which was beginning even to taste Wordsworth, found his verses inexpressibly wearisome. They would not throng and subscribe for a collected edition of those works which singly had been too much for them. With whatever dulness of sense they may be charged, they have a remarkably keen scent for tediousness, and will have none of it unless in a tract or sermon, where, of course, it is to be expected. Percival never forgave the public; but it was the critics he never should have forgiven, for of all the maggots that can make their way into the brains through the ears, there is none so disastrous as the persuasion that you are a great poet. There is surely something in the construction of the ears of small authors which lays them specially open to the inroads of this pest. It tickles pleasantly while it eats away the fibre of will, and incapacitates a man for all honest commerce with realities. Unhappily its insidious titillation seems to have been Percival's one great pleasure during life.

We began by saying that the book before us was interesting and instructive; but we meant that it was so not so much from any positive merits of its own as by the lesson which almost every page of it suggests. To those who have some knowledge of the history of literature, or some experience in life, it is from beginning to end a history of weakness mistaking great desires for great powers. If poetry, in Bacon's noble definition of it, "adapt the shows of things to the desires of the mind," sentimentalism is equally skilful in making realities shape themselves to the

cravings of vanity. The theory that the poet is a being above the world and apart from it is true of him as an observer only who applies to the phenomena about him the test of a finer and more spiritual sense. That he is a creature divinely set apart from his fellow-men by a mental organisation that makes them mutually unintelligible to each other, is in flat contradiction with the lives of those poets universally acknowledged as greatest. Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Calderon, Milton, Molière, Goethe—in what conceivable sense is it true of them that they wanted the manly qualities which made them equal to the demands of the world in which they lived? That a poet should assume, as Victor Hugo used to do, that he is a reorganiser of the moral world, and that works cunningly adapted to the popular whim of the time form part of some mysterious system which is to give us a new heaven and a new earth, and to remodel laws of art which are as unchangeable as those of astronomy, can do no very great harm to anyone but the author himself, who will thereby be led astray from his proper function, and from the only path to legitimate and lasting success. But when the theory is carried a step further, and we are asked to believe, as in Percival's case, that, because a man can write verses, he is exempt from that inexorable logic of life and circumstances to which all other men are subjected, and to which it is wholesome for them that they should be, then it becomes mischievous, and calls for a protest from all those who have at heart the interests of good morals and healthy literature. It is the theory of idlers and *dilettanti*, of fribbles in morals and declaimers in verse, which a young man of real power may dally with during some fit of mental indigestion, but which when accepted by a mature man, and carried along with him through life, is a sure mark of feebleness and of insincere dealing with himself. Percival is a good example of a class of authors unhappily too numerous in these latter days. In Europe the natural growth of a world ill at ease with itself, and still nervous with the frightful palpitation of the French Revolution,

they are but feeble exotics in our healthier air. Without faith or hope, and deprived of that outward support in the habitual procession of events and in the authoritative limitations of thought which in ordinary times gives steadiness to feeble and timid intellects, they are turned inward, and forced, like Hudibras's sword,

> "To eat into themselves, for lack
> Of other thing to hew and hack."

Compelled to find within them that stay which had hitherto been supplied by creeds and institutions, they learned to attribute to their own consciousness the grandeur which belongs of right only to the mind of the human race, slowly endeavouring after an equilibrium between its desires and the external conditions under which they are attainable. Hence that exaggeration of the individual, and depreciation of the social man, which has become the cant of modern literature. Abundance of such phenomena accompanied the rise of what was called Romanticism in Germany and France, reacting to some extent even upon England, and consequently America. The smaller poets erected themselves into a kind of guild, into which all were admitted who gave proof of a certain feebleness of character which rendered them superior to their grosser fellow-men. It was a society of cripples undertaking to teach the new generation how to walk. Meanwhile, the object of their generous solicitude, what with clinging to Mother Past's skirts, and helping itself by every piece of household furniture it could lay hands on, learned, after many a tumble, to get on its legs, and to use them as other generations had done before it. Percival belonged to this new order of bards, weak in the knees, and thinking it healthy exercise to climb the peaks of Dreamland. To the vague and misty views attainable from those sublime summits into his own vast interior, his reports in blank verse and otherwise did ample justice, but failed to excite the appetite of mankind. He spent his life, like others of his class, in proclaiming himself a neglected Columbus,

ever ready to start on his voyage when the public would supply the means of building his ships. Meanwhile, to be ready at a moment's warning, he packs his mind pell-mell like a carpet bag, wraps a geologist's hammer in a shirt with a Byron collar, does up Volney's "Ruins" with an odd volume of Wordsworth, and another of Bell's "Anatomy" in a loose sheet of Webster's Dictionary, jams Moore's poems between the leaves of Bopp's Grammar—and forgets only such small matters as combs and brushes. It never seems to have entered his head that the gulf between genius and its new world is never too wide for a stout swimmer. Like all sentimentalists, he reversed the process of nature, which makes it a part of greatness that it is a simple thing to itself, however much of a marvel it may be to other men. He discovered his own genius, as he supposed—a thing impossible had the genius been real. Donne never wrote a profounder verse than

"Who knows his virtue's name and place, hath none."

Percival's life was by no means a remarkable one, except, perhaps, in the number of chances that seem to have been offered him to make something of himself, if anything were possibly to be made. He was never without friends, never without opportunities, if he could have availed himself of them. It is pleasant to see Mr. Ticknor treating him with that considerate kindness which many a young scholar can remember as shown so generously to himself. But nothing could help Percival, whose nature had defeat worked into its very composition. He was not a real, but an imaginary man. His early attempt at suicide (as Mr. Ward seems to think it) is typical of him. He is not the first young man who, when crossed in love, has spoken of "loupin o'er a linn," nor will he be the last. But that anyone who really meant to kill himself should put himself resolutely in the way of being prevented, as Percival did, is hard to believe. Châteaubriand, the arch sentimentalist of these latter days, had the same harmless velleity of self-destruction,—enough to scare his sister and so give him

a smack of sensation,—but a very different thing from the settled will which would be really perilous. Shakespeare, always true to Nature, makes Hamlet dally with the same exciting fancy. Alas! self is the one thing the sentimentalist never truly wishes to destroy! One remarkable gift Percival seems to have had, which may be called memory of the eye. What he saw he never forgot, and this fitted him for a good geological observer. How great his power of combination was, which alone could have made him a great geologist, we cannot determine. But he seems to have shown but little in other directions. His faculty of acquiring foreign tongues we do not value so highly as Mr. Ward. We have known many otherwise inferior men who possessed it. Indeed, the power to express the same nothing in ten different languages is something to be dreaded rather than admired. It gives a horrible advantage to dulness. The best thing to be learned from Percival's life is that he was happy for the first time when taken away from his vague pursuit of the ideal, and set to practical work.

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## *THOREAU.*

What contemporary, if he was in the fighting period of his life (since Nature sets limits about her conscription for spiritual fields, as the state does in physical warfare), will ever forget what was somewhat vaguely called the "Transcendental Movement" of thirty years ago? Apparently set astirring by Carlyle's essays on the "Signs of the Times," and on "History," the final and more immediate impulse seemed to be given by "Sartor Resartus." At least the republication in Boston of that wonderful Abraham à Sancta Clara sermon on Lear's text of the miserable forked radish gave the signal for a sudden mental and moral mutiny. *Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile!* was shouted on all hands with every variety of emphasis, and by

voices of every conceivable pitch, representing the three sexes of men, women, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagues. The nameless eagle of the tree Ygdrasil was about to sit at last, and wild-eyed enthusiasts rushed from all sides, each eager to thrust under the mystic bird that chalk egg from which the new and fairer Creation was to be hatched in due time. *Redeunt Saturnia regna*—so far was certain, though in what shape, or by what methods, was still a matter of debate. Every possible form of intellectual and physical dyspepsia brought forth its gospel. Bran had its prophets, and the presartorial simplicity of Adam its martyrs, tailored impromptu from the tar-pot by incensed neighbours, and sent forth to illustrate the "feathered Mercury," as defined by Webster and Worcester. Plainness of speech was carried to a pitch that would have taken away the breath of George Fox; and even swearing had its evangelists, who answered a simple inquiry after their health with an elaborate ingenuity of imprecation that might have been honourably mentioned by Marlborough in general orders. Everybody had a mission (with a capital M) to attend to everybody-else's business. No brain but had its private maggot, which must have found pitiably short commons sometimes. Not a few impecunious zealots abjured the use of money (unless earned by other people), professing to live on the internal revenues of the spirit. Some had an assurance of instant millennium so soon as hooks and eyes should be substituted for buttons. Communities were established where everything was to be common but common-sense. Men renounced their old gods, and hesitated only whether to bestow their furloughed allegiance on Thor or Budh. Conventions were held for every hitherto inconceivable purpose. The belated gift of tongues, as among the Fifth Monarchy men, spread like a contagion, rendering its victims incomprehensible to all Christian men; whether equally so to the most distant possible heathen or not was unexperimented, though many would have subscribed liberally that a fair trial might be made. It was the pentecost of Shinar. The day of utterances reproduced the day of rebuses and anagrams, and

there was nothing so simple that uncial letters and the style of Diphilus the Labyrinth could not turn into a riddle. Many foreign revolutionists out of work added to the general misunderstanding their contribution of broken English in every most ingenious form of fracture. All stood ready at a moment's notice to reform everything but themselves. The general motto was :—

> "And we'll *talk* with them, too,
> And take upon 's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies."

Nature is always kind enough to give even her clouds a humorous lining. We have barely hinted at the comic side of the affair, for the material was endless. This was the whistle and trailing fuse of the shell, but there was a very solid and serious kernel, full of the most deadly explosiveness. Thoughtful men divined it, but the generality suspected nothing. The word "transcendental," then, was the maid-of-all-work for those who could not think, as "Pre-Raphaelite" has been more recently for people of the same limited housekeeping. The truth is, that there was a much nearer metaphysical relation and a much more distant æsthetic and literary relation between Carlyle and the Apostles of the Newness, as they were called in New England, than has commonly been supposed. Both represented the reaction and revolt against *Philisterei*, a renewal of the old battle begun in modern times by Erasmus and Reuchlin, and continued by Lessing, Goethe, and, in a far narrower sense, by Heine in Germany, and of which Fielding, Sterne, and Wordsworth in different ways have been the leaders in England. It was simply a struggle for fresh air, in which, if the windows could not be opened, there was danger that panes would be broken, though painted with images of saints and martyrs. Light coloured by these reverend effigies was none the more respirable for being picturesque. There is only one thing better than tradition, and that is the original and eternal life out of which all tradition takes its rise. It was this life which

the reformers demanded, with more or less clearness of consciousness and expression, life in politics, life in literature, life in religion. Of what use to import a gospel from Judæa, if we leave behind the soul that made it possible, the God who keeps it for ever real and present? Surely Abana and Pharpar *are* better than Jordan, if a living faith be mixed with those waters and none with these.

Scotch Presbyterianism as a motive of spiritual progress was dead; New England Puritanism was in like manner dead; in other words, Protestantism had made its fortune and no longer protested; but till Carlyle spoke out in the Old World and Emerson in the New, no one had dared to proclaim, *Le roi est mort: vive le roi!* The meaning of which proclamation was essentially this: the vital spirit has long since departed out of this form once so kingly, and the great seal has been in commission long enough; but meanwhile the soul of man, from which all power emanates and to which it reverts, still survives in undiminished royalty; God still survives, little as you gentlemen of the Commission seem to be aware of it—nay, may possibly outlive the whole of you, incredible as it may appear. The truth is, that both Scotch Presbyterianism and New England Puritanism made their new avatar in Carlyle and Emerson, the heralds of their formal decease, and the tendency of the one toward Authority and of the other toward Independency might have been prophesied by whoever had studied history. The necessity was not so much in the men as in the principles they represented and the traditions which overruled them. The Puritanism of the past found its unwilling poet in Hawthorne, the rarest creative imagination of the century, the rarest in some ideal respects since Shakespeare; but the Puritanism that made New England what it is, and is destined to make America what it should be, found its voice in Emerson. Though holding himself aloof from all active partnership in movements of reform, he has been the sleeping partner who has supplied a great part of their capital.

The artistic range of Emerson is narrow, as every well-

read critic must feel at once; and so is that of Æschylus, so is that of Dante, so is that of Montaigne, so is that of Schiller, so is that of nearly every one except Shakespeare; but there is a gauge of height no less than of breadth, of individuality as well as of comprehensiveness, and, above all, there is the standard of genetic power, the test of the masculine as distinguished from the receptive minds. There are staminate plants in literature, that make no fine show of fruit, but without whose pollen, quintessence of fructifying gold, the garden had been barren. Emerson's mind is emphatically one of these, and there is no man to whom our æsthetic culture owes so much. The Puritan revolt had made us ecclesiastically, and the Revolution politically independent, but we were still socially and intellectually moored to English thought, till Emerson cut the cable and gave us a chance at the dangers and the glories of blue water. No man young enough to have felt it can forget, or cease to be grateful for, the mental and moral *nudge* which he received from the writings of his high-minded and brave-spirited countryman. That we agree with him, or that he always agrees with himself, is aside from the question; but that he arouses in us something that we are the better for having awakened, whether that something be of opposition or assent, that he speaks always to what is highest and least selfish in us, few Americans of the generation younger than his own would be disposed to deny. His oration before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge, some thirty years ago, was an event without any former parallel in our literary annals, a scene to be always treasured in the memory for its picturesqueness and its inspiration. What crowded and breathless aisles, what windows clustering with eager heads, what enthusiasm of approval, what grim silence of foregone dissent! It was our Yankee version of a lecture by Abelard, our Harvard parallel to the last public appearances of Schelling.

We said that the Transcendental Movement was the Protestant spirit of Puritanism seeking a new outlet and an escape from forms and creeds which compressed rather

than expressed it. In its motives, its preaching, and its results, it differed radically from the doctrine of Carlyle. The Scotchman, with all his genius, and his humour gigantesque as that of Rabelais, has grown shriller and shriller with years, degenerating sometimes into a common scold, and emptying very unsavoury vials of wrath on the heads of the sturdy British Socrates of worldly common-sense. The teaching of Emerson tended much more exclusively to self-culture and the independent development of the individual man. It seemed to many almost Pythagorean in its voluntary seclusion from commonwealth affairs. Both Carlyle and Emerson were disciples of Goethe, but Emerson in a far truer sense; and while the one, from his bias toward the eccentric, has degenerated more and more into mannerism, the other has clarified steadily toward perfection of style—exquisite fineness of material, unobtrusive lowness of tone and simplicity of fashion, the most high-bred garb of expression. Whatever may be said of his thought, nothing can be finer than the delicious limpidness of his phrase. If it was ever questionable whether democracy could develop a gentleman, the problem has been affirmatively solved at last. Carlyle, in his cynicism and his admiration of force in and for itself, has become at last positively inhuman; Emerson, reverencing strength, seeking the highest outcome of the individual, has found that society and politics are also main elements in the attainment of the desired end, and has drawn steadily manward and worldward. The two men represent respectively those grand personifications in the drama of Æschylus, Βία and Κράτος.

Among the pistillate plants kindled to fruitage by the Emersonian pollen, Thoreau is thus far the most remarkable; and it is something eminently fitting that his posthumous works should be offered us by Emerson, for they are strawberries from his own garden. A singular mixture of varieties, indeed, there is;—alpine, some of them, with the flavour of real mountain air; others wood, tasting of sunny roadside banks or shy openings in the forest; and not a few

seedlings swollen hugely by culture, but lacking the fine natural aroma of the more modest kinds. Strange books these are of his, and interesting in many ways,—instructive chiefly as showing how considerable a crop may be raised on a comparatively narrow close of mind, and how much a man may make of his life if he will assiduously follow it, though perhaps never truly finding it at last.

We have just been renewing our recollection of Mr. Thoreau's writings, and have read through his six volumes in the order of their production. We shall try to give an adequate report of their impression upon us both as critic and as mere reader. He seems to us to have been a man with so high a conceit of himself that he accepted without questioning, and insisted on our accepting, his defects and weaknesses of character as virtues and powers peculiar to himself. Was he indolent, he finds none of the activities which attract or employ the rest of mankind worthy of him. Was he wanting in the qualities that make success, it is success that is contemptible, and not himself that lacks persistency and purpose. Was he poor, money was an unmixed evil. Did his life seem a selfish one, he condemns doing good as one of the weakest of superstitions. To be of use was with him the most killing bait of the wily tempter Uselessness. He had no faculty of generalisation from outside of himself, or at least no experience which would supply the material of such, and he makes his own whim the law, his own range the horizon of the universe. He condemns a world, the hollowness of whose satisfactions he had never had the means of testing, and we recognise Apemantus behind the mask of Timon. He had little active imagination; of the receptive he had much. His appreciation is of the highest quality; his critical power, from want of continuity of mind, very limited and inadequate. He somewhere cites a simile from Ossian, as an example of the superiority of the old poetry to the new, though, even were the historic evidence less convincing, the sentimental melancholy of those poems should be conclusive of their modernness.

He had no artistic power such as controls a great work to the serene balance of completeness, but exquisite mechanical skill in the shaping of sentences and paragraphs, or (more rarely) short bits of verse for the expression of a detached thought, sentiment, or image. His works give one the feeling of a sky full of stars,—something impressive and exhilarating certainly, something high overhead and freckled thickly with spots of isolated brightness; but whether these have any mutual relation with each other, or have any concern with our mundane matters, is for the most part matter of conjecture,—astrology as yet, and not astronomy.

It is curious, considering what Thoreau afterwards became, that he was not by nature an observer. He only saw the things he looked for, and was less poet than naturalist. Till he built his Walden shanty, he did not know that the hickory grew in Concord. Till he went to Maine, he had never seen phosphorescent wood, a phenomenon early familiar to most country boys. At forty he speaks of the seeding of the pine as a new discovery, though one should have thought that its gold-dust of blowing pollen might have earlier drawn his eye. Neither his attention nor his genius was of the spontaneous kind. He discovered nothing. He thought everything a discovery of his own, from moonlight to the planting of acorns and nuts by squirrels. This is a defect in his character, but one of his chief charms as a writer. Everything grows fresh under his hand. He delved in his mind and nature; he planted them with all manner of native and foreign seeds, and reaped assiduously. He was not merely solitary, he would be isolated, and succeeded at last in almost persuading himself that he was autochthonous. He valued everything in proportion as he fancied it to be exclusively his own. He complains in "Walden," that there is no one in Concord with whom he could talk of Oriental literature, though the man was living within two miles of his hut who had introduced him to it. This intellectual selfishness becomes sometimes almost painful in reading

him. He lacked that generosity of "communication" which Johnson admired in Burke. De Quincy tells us that Wordsworth was impatient when any one else spoke of mountains, as if he had a peculiar property in them. And we can readily understand why it should be so; no one is satisfied with another's appreciation of his mistress. But Thoreau seems to have prized a lofty way of thinking (often we should be inclined to call it a remote one) not so much because it was good in itself as because he wished few to share it with him. It seems now and then as if he did not seek to lure others up "above our lower region of turmoil," but to leave his own name cut on the mountain peak as the first climber. This itch of originality infects his thought and style. To be misty is not to be mystic. He turns commonplaces end for end, and fancies it makes something new of them. As we walk down Park Street, our eye is caught by Dr. Windship's dumb-bells, one of which bears an inscription testifying that it is the heaviest ever put up at arm's length by any athlete; and in reading Mr. Thoreau's books we cannot help feeling as if he sometimes invited our attention to a particular sophism or paradox, as the biggest yet maintained by any single writer. He seeks, at all risks, for perversity of thought, and revives the age of *concetti* while he fancies himself going back to a pre-classical nature. "A day," he says, "passed in the society of those Greek sages, such as described in the Banquet of Xenophon, would not be comparable with the dry wit of decayed cranberry-vines and the fresh Attic salt of the moss-beds." It is not so much the True that he loves as the Out-of-the-way. As the Brazen Age shows itself in other men by exaggeration of phrase, so in him by extravagance of statement. He wishes always to trump your suit and to *ruff* when you least expect it. Do you love Nature because she is beautiful? He will find a better argument in her ugliness. Are you tired of the artificial man? He instantly dresses you up an ideal in a Penobscot Indian, and attributes to this creature of his otherwise-mindedness as peculiarities things that are common to all woodsmen,

white or red, and this simply because he has not studied the pale-faced variety.

This notion of an absolute originality, as if one could have a patent-right in it, is an absurdity. A man cannot escape in thought, any more than he can in language, from the past and the present. As no one ever invents a word, and yet language somehow grows by general contribution and necessity, so it is with thought. Mr. Thoreau seems to us to insist in public on going back to flint and steel, when there is a match-box in his pocket which he knows very well how to use at a pinch. Originality consists in power of digesting and assimilating thought, so that they become part of our life and substance. Montaigne, for example, is one of the most original of authors, though he helped himself to ideas in every direction. But they turn to blood and colouring in his style, and give a freshness of complexion that is for ever charming. In Thoreau much seems yet to be foreign and unassimilated, showing itself in symptoms of indigestion. A preacher-up of Nature, we now and then detect under the surly and stoic garb something of the sophist and the sentimentaliser. We are far from implying that this was conscious on his part. But it is much easier for a man to impose on himself when he measures only with himself. A greater familiarity with ordinary men would have done Thoreau good, by showing him how many fine qualities are common to the race. The radical vice of his theory of life was, that he confounded physical with spiritual remoteness from men. One is far enough withdrawn from his fellows if he keep himself clear of their weaknesses. He is not so truly withdrawn as exiled, if he refuse to share in their strength. "Solitude," says Cowley, "can be well fitted and set right but upon a very few persons. They must have enough knowledge of the world to see the vanity of it, and enough virtue to despise all vanity." It is a morbid self-consciousness that pronounces the world of men empty and worthless before trying it, the instinctive evasion of one who is sensible of some innate weakness, and retorts the accusation of it

before any has made it but himself. To a healthy mind, the world is a constant challenge of opportunity. Mr. Thoreau had not a healthy mind, or he would not have been so fond of prescribing. His whole life was a search for the doctor. The old mystics had a wiser sense of what the world was worth. They ordained a severe apprenticeship to law, and even ceremonial, in order to the gaining of freedom and mastery over these. Seven years of service for Rachel were to be rewarded at last with Leah. Seven other years of faithfulness with her were to win them at last the true bride of their souls. Active Life was with them the only path to the Contemplative.

Thoreau had no humour, and this implies that he was a sorry logician. Himself an artist in rhetoric, he confounds thought with style when he undertakes to speak of the latter. He was for ever talking of getting away from the world, but he must always be near enough to it, nay, to the Concord corner of it, to feel the impression he makes there. He verifies the shrewd remark of Sainte-Beuve, "On touche encore à son temps et très fort, même quand on le repousse." This egotism of his is a Stylites pillar after all, a seclusion which keeps him in the public eye. The dignity of man is an excellent thing, but therefore to hold one's self too sacred and precious is the reverse of excellent. There is something delightfully absurd in six volumes addressed to a world of such "vulgar fellows" as Thoreau affirmed his fellow-men to be. We once had a glimpse of a genuine solitary who spent his winters one hundred and fifty miles beyond all human communication, and there dwelt with his rifle as his only confidant. Compared with this, the shanty on Walden Pond has something the air, it must be confessed, of the Hermitage of La Chevrette. We do not believe that the way to a true cosmopolitanism carries one into the woods or the society of musquashes. Perhaps the narrowest provincialism is that of Self; that of Kleinwinkel is nothing to it. The natural man, like the singing birds, comes out of the forest as inevitably as the natural bear and the wild-cat stick there. To seek to be natural implies

a consciousness that forbids all naturalness for ever. It is as easy—and no easier—to be natural in a *salon* as in a swamp, if one do not aim at it, for what we call unnaturalness always has its spring in a man's thinking too much about himself. "It is impossible," said Turgot, "for a vulgar man to be simple."

We look upon a great deal of the modern sentimentalism about Nature as a mark of disease. It is one more symptom of the general liver-complaint. To a man of wholesome constitution the wilderness is well enough for a mood or a vacation, but not for a habit of life. Those who have most loudly advertised their passion for seclusion and their intimacy with nature, from Petrarch down, have been mostly sentimentalists, unreal men, misanthropes on the spindle side, solacing an uneasy suspicion of themselves by professing contempt for their kind. They make demands on the world in advance proportioned to their inward measure of their own merit, and are angry that the world pays only by the visible measure of performance. It is true of Rousseau, the modern founder of the sect, true of Saint Pierre, his intellectual child, and of Châteaubriand, his grandchild, the inventor, we might almost say, of the primitive forest, and who first was touched by the solemn falling of a tree from natural decay in the windless silence of the woods. It is a very shallow view that affirms trees and rocks to be healthy, and cannot see that men in communities are just as true to the laws of their organisation and destiny; that can tolerate the puffin and the fox, but not the fool and the knave; that would shun politics because of its demagogues, and snuff up the stench of the obscene fungus. The divine life of Nature is more wonderful, more various, more sublime in man than in any other of her works, and the wisdom that is gained by commerce with men, as Montaigne and Shakespeare gained it, or with one's own soul among men, as Dante, is the most delightful, as it is the most precious, of all. In outward nature it is still man that interests us, and we care far less for the things seen than the way in which poetic eyes like Wordsworth's

or Thoreau's see them, and the reflections they cast there. To hear the to-do that is often made over the simple fact that a man sees the image of himself in the outward world, one is reminded of a savage when he for the first time catches a glimpse of himself in a looking-glass. "Venerable child of Nature," we are tempted to say, "to whose science in the invention of the tobacco-pipe, to whose art in the tattooing of thine undegenerated hide not yet enslaved by tailors, we are slowly striving to climb back, the miracle thou beholdest is sold in my unhappy country for a shilling!" If matters go on as they have done, and everybody must needs blab of all the favours that have been done him by roadside and river brink and woodland walk, as if to kiss and tell were no longer treachery, it will be a positive refreshment to meet a man who is as superbly indifferent to nature as she is to him. By and by we shall have John Smith, of No. 12, 12th Street, advertising that he is not the J. S. who saw a cow-lily on Thursday last, as he never saw one in his life, would not see one if he could, and is prepared to prove an alibi on the day in question.

Solitary communion with Nature does not seem to have been sanitary or sweetening in its influence on Thoreau's character. On the contrary, his letters show him more cynical as he grew older. While he studied with respectful attention the minks and woodchucks, his neighbours, he looked with utter contempt on the august drama of destiny of which his country was the scene, and on which the curtain had already risen. He was converting us back to a state of nature "so eloquently," as Voltaire said of Rousseau, "that he almost persuaded us to go on all fours," while the wiser fates were making it possible for us to walk erect for the first time. Had he conversed more with his fellows, his sympathies would have widened with the assurance that his peculiar genius had more appreciation, and his writings a larger circle of readers, or at least a warmer one, than he dreamed of. We have the highest

testimony* to the natural sweetness, sincerity, and nobleness of his temper, and in his books an equally irrefragable one to the rare quality of his mind. He was not a strong thinker, but a sensitive feeler. Yet his mind strikes us as cold and wintry in its purity. A light snow has fallen everywhere in which he seems to come on the track of the shier sensations that would elsewhere leave no trace. We think greater compression would have done more for his fame. A feeling of sameness comes over us as we read so much. Trifles are recorded with an over-minute punctuality and conscientiousness of detail. He records the state of his personal thermometer thirteen times a day. We cannot help thinking sometimes of the man who

> "Watches, starves, freezes, and sweats
> To learn but catechisms and alphabets
> Of unconcerning things, matters of fact,"

and sometimes of the saying of the Persian poet, that "when the owl would boast, he boasts of catching mice at the edge of a hole." We could readily part with some of his affectations. It was well enough for Pythagoras to say, once for all, "When I was Euphorbus at the siege of Troy;" not so well for Thoreau to travesty it into "When I was a shepherd on the plains of Assyria." A naive thing said over again is anything but naive. But with every exception, there is no writing comparable with Thoreau's in kind, that is comparable with it in degree where it is best; where it disengages itself, that is, from the tangled roots and dead leaves of a second-hand Orientalism, and runs limpid and smooth and broadening as it runs, a mirror for whatever is grand and lovely in both worlds.

George Sand says neatly, that "Art is not a study of positive reality" (*actuality* were the fitter word), "but a seeking after ideal truth." It would be doing very inadequate justice to Thoreau if we left it to be inferred that this ideal element did not exist in him, and that too in

* Mr. Emerson, in the Biographical Sketch prefixed to the "Excursions."

larger proportion, if less obtrusive, than his nature-worship. He took nature as the mountain-path to an ideal world. If the path wind a good deal, if he record too faithfully every trip over a root, if he botanise somewhat wearisomely, he gives us now and then superb outlooks from some jutting crag, and brings us out at last into an illimitable ether, where the breathing is not difficult for those who have any true touch of the climbing spirit. His shanty-life was a mere impossibility, so far as his own conception of it goes, as an entire independency of mankind. The tub of Diogenes had a sounder bottom. Thoreau's experiment actually presupposed all that complicated civilisation which it theoretically abjured. He squatted on another man's land; he borrows an axe; his boards, his nails, his bricks, his mortar, his books, his lamp, his fish-hooks, his plough, his hoe, all turn state's evidence against him as an accomplice in the sin of that artificial civilisation which rendered it possible that such a person as Henry D. Thoreau should exist at all. *Magnis tamen excidit ausis.* His aim was a noble and a useful one, in the direction of "plain living and high thinking." It was a practical sermon on Emerson's text that "things are in the saddle and ride mankind," an attempt to solve Carlyle's problem (condensed from Johnson) of "lessening your denominator." His whole life was a rebuke of the waste and aimlessness of our American luxury, which is an abject enslavement to tawdry upholstery. He had "fine translunary things" in him. His better style as a writer is in keeping with the simplicity and purity of his life. We have said that his range was narrow, but to be a master is to be a master. He had caught his English at its living source, among the poets and prose-writers of its best days; his literature was extensive and recondite; his quotations are always nuggets of the purest ore: there are sentences of his as perfect as anything in the language, and thoughts as clearly crystallised; his metaphors and images are always fresh from the soil; he had watched Nature like a detective who is to go upon the stand; as we read him, it seems as if all out-of-doors had kept a diary and become its own

Montaigne; we look at the landscape as in a Claude Lorraine glass; compared with his, all other books of similar aim, even White's "Selborne," seem dry as a country clergyman's meteorological journal in an old almanack. He belongs with Donne and Browne and Novalis; if not with the originally creative men, with the scarcely smaller class who are peculiar, and whose leaves shed their invisible thought-seed like ferns.

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## EMERSON THE LECTURER.

It is a singular fact that Mr. Emerson is the most steadily attractive lecturer in America. Into that somewhat cold-waterish region adventurers of the sensational kind come down now and then with a splash, to become disregarded King Logs before the next season. But Mr. Emerson always draws. A lecturer now for something like a third of a century, one of the pioneers of the lecturing system, the charm of his voice, his manner, and his matter has never lost its powers over his earlier hearers, and continually winds new ones in its enchanting meshes. What they do not fully understand they take on trust, and listen, saying to themselves, as the old poet of Sir Philip Sidney:—

> "A sweet, attractive, kind of grace,
> A full assurance given by looks,
> Continual comfort in a face,
> The lineaments of gospel books."

We call it a singular fact, because we Yankees are thought to be fond of the spread-eagle style, and nothing can be more remote from that than his. We are reckoned a practical folk, who would rather hear about a new air-tight stove than about Plato; yet our favourite teacher's practicality is not in the least of the Poor Richard variety. If he have any Buncombe constituency, it is that unrealised commonwealth of philosophers which Plotinus proposed to establish;

and if he were to make an almanack, his directions to farmers would be something like this:—"OCTOBER: *Indian Summer;* now is the time to get in your early Vedas." What, then, is his secret? Is it not that he out-Yankees us all? that his range includes us all? that he is equally at home with the potato-disease and original sin, with pegging shoes and the Over-soul? that, as we try all trades, so has he tried all cultures? and above all, that his mysticism gives us a counterpoise to our super-practicality?

There is no man living to whom, as a writer, so many of us feel and thankfully acknowledge so great an indebtedness for ennobling impulses—none whom so many cannot abide. What does he mean? ask these last. Where is his system? What is the use of it all? What the deuce have we to do with Brahma? I do not propose to write an essay on Emerson at this time. I will only say that one may find grandeur and consolation in a starlit night without caring to ask what it means, save grandeur and consolation; one may like Montaigne, as some ten generations before us have done, without thinking him so systematic as some more eminently tedious (or shall we say tediously eminent?) authors; one may think roses as good in their way as cabbages, though the latter would make a better show in the witness box, if cross-examined as to their usefulness; and as for Brahma, why, he can take care of himself, and won't bite us at any rate.

The bother with Mr. Emerson is that, though he writes in prose, he is essentially a poet. If you undertake to paraphrase what he says, and to reduce it to words of one syllable for infant minds, you will make as sad work of it as the good monk with his analysis of Homer in the "Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum." We look upon him as one of the few men of genius whom our age has produced, and there needs no better proof of it than his masculine faculty of fecundating other minds. Search for his eloquence in his books and you will perchance miss it, but meanwhile you will find that it has kindled all your thoughts. For choice and pith of language he belongs to a

better age than ours, and might rub shoulders with Fuller and Browne—though he does use that abominable word *reliable*. His eye for a fine, telling phrase that will carry true is like that of a backwoodsman for a rifle; and he will dredge you up a choice word from the mud of Cotton Mather himself. A diction at once so rich and so homely as his I know not where to match in these days of writing by the page; it is like homespun cloth-of-gold. The many cannot miss his meaning, and only the few can find it. It is the open secret of all true genius. It is wholesome to angle in those profound pools, though one be rewarded with nothing more than the leap of a fish that flashes his freckled side in the sun and as suddenly absconds in the dark and dreamy waters again. There is keen excitement, though there be no ponderable acquisition. If we carry nothing home in our baskets, there is ample gain in dilated lungs and stimulated blood. What does he mean, quotha? He means inspiring hints, a diving-rod to your deeper nature. No doubt, Emerson, like all original men, has his peculiar audience, and yet I know none that can hold a promiscuous crowd in pleased attention so long as he. As in all original men, there is something for every palate. "Would you know," says Goethe, "the ripest cherries? Ask the boys and the blackbirds."

The announcement that such a pleasure as a new course of lectures by him is coming, to people as old as I am, is something like those forebodings of spring that prepare us every year for a familiar novelty, none the less novel, when it arrives, because it is familiar. We know perfectly well what we are to expect from Mr. Emerson, and yet what he says always penetrates and stirs us, as is apt to be the case with genius, in a very unlooked-for fashion. Perhaps genius is one of the few things which we gladly allow to repeat itself—one of the few that multiply rather than weaken the force of their impression by iteration! Perhaps some of us hear more than the mere words, are moved by something deeper than the thoughts? If it be so, we are quite right, for it is thirty years and more of "plain living and high

thinking" that speak to us in this altogether unique lay-preacher. We have shared in the beneficence of this varied culture, this fearless impartiality in criticism and speculation, this masculine sincerity, this sweetness of nature which rather stimulates than cloys, for a generation long. If ever there was a standing testimonial to the cumulative power and value of Character (and we need it sadly in these days), we have it in this gracious and dignified presence. What an antiseptic is a pure life! At sixty-five (or two years beyond his grand climacteric, as he would prefer to call it) he has that privilege of soul which abolishes the calendar, and presents him to us always the unwasted contemporary of his own prime. I do not know if he seem old to his younger hearers, but we who have known him so long wonder at the tenacity with which he maintains himself even in the outposts of youth. I suppose it is not the Emerson of 1868 to whom we listen. For us the whole life of the man is distilled in the clear drop of every sentence, and behind each word we divine the force of a noble character, the weight of a large capital of thinking and being. We do not go to hear what Emerson says so much as to hear Emerson. Not that we perceive any falling-off in anything that ever was essential to the charm of Mr. Emerson's peculiar style of thought or phrase. The first lecture, to be sure, was more disjointed even than common. It was as if, after vainly trying to get his paragraphs into sequence and order, he had at last tried the desperate expedient of *shuffling* them. It was chaos come again, but it was a chaos full of shooting-stars, a jumble of creative forces. The second lecture, on "Criticism and Poetry," was quite up to the level of old times, full of that power of strangely-subtle association whose indirect approaches startle the mind into almost painful attention, of those flashes of mutual understanding between speaker and hearer that are gone ere one can say it lightens. The vice of Emerson's criticism seems to be, that while no man is so sensitive to what is poetical, few men are less sensible than he of what makes a poem. He values the solid meaning of thought

above the subtler meaning of style. He would prefer Donne, I suspect, to Spenser, and sometimes mistakes the queer for the original.

To be young is surely the best, if the most precarious, gift of life; yet there are some of us who would hardly consent to be young again, if it were at the cost of our recollection of Mr. Emerson's first lectures during the consulate of Van Buren. We used to walk in from the country to the Masonic Temple (I think it was), through the crisp winter night, and listen to that thrilling voice of his, so charged with subtle meaning and subtle music, as shipwrecked men on a raft to the hail of a ship that came with unhoped-for food and rescue. Cynics might say what they liked. Did our own imaginations transfigure dry remainder-biscuit into ambrosia? At any rate, he brought us *life*, which, on the whole, is no bad thing. Was it all transcendentalism? magic-lantern pictures on mist? As you will. Those, then, were just what we wanted. But it was not so. The delight and the benefit were that he put us in communication with a larger style of thought, sharpened our wits with a more pungent phrase, gave us ravishing glimpses of an ideal under the dry husk of our New England; made us conscious of the supreme and everlasting originality of whatever bit of soul might be in any of us; freed us, in short, from the stocks of prose in which we had sat so long that we had grown well-nigh contented in our cramps. And who that saw the audience will ever forget it, where everyone still capable of fire, or longing to renew in them the half-forgotten sense of it, was gathered? Those faces, young and old, agleam with pale intellectual light, eager with pleased attention, flash upon me once more from the deep recesses of the years with an exquisite pathos. Ah, beautiful young eyes, brimming with love and hope, wholly vanished now in that other world we call the Past, or peering doubtfully through the pensive gloaming of memory, your light impoverishes these cheaper days! I hear again that rustle of sensation, as they turned to exchange glances over some pithier thought, some keener

flash of that humour which always played about the horizon of his mind like heat-lightning, and it seems now like the sad whisper of the autumn leaves that are whirling around me. But would my picture be complete if I forgot that ample and vegete countenance of Mr. R——— of W——— —how, from its regular post at the corner of the front bench, it turned in ruddy triumph to the profaner audience, as if he were the inexplicably appointed fugleman of appreciation? I was reminded of him by those hearty cherubs in Titian's Assumption, that look at you as who should say, "Did you ever see a Madonna like *that?* Did you ever behold one hundred and fifty pounds of womanhood mount heavenward before like a rocket?"

To some of us that long-past experience remains as the most marvellous and fruitful we have ever had. Emerson awakened us, saved us from the body of this death. It is the sound of the trumpet that the young soul longs for, careless what breath may fill it. Sidney heard it in the ballad of "Chevy Chase," and we in Emerson. Nor did it blow retreat, but called to us with assurance of victory. Did they say he was disconnected? So were the stars, that seemed larger to our eyes, still keen with that excitement, as we walked homeward with prouder stride over the creaking snow. And were *they* not knit together by a higher logic than our mere sense could master? Were we enthusiasts? I hope and believe we were, and am thankful to the man who made us worth something for once in our lives. If asked what was left? what we carried home? we should not have been careful for an answer. It would have been enough if we had said that something beautiful had passed that way. Or we might have asked in return what one brought away from a symphony of Beethoven? Enough that he had set that ferment of wholesome discontent at work in us. There is one, at least, of those old hearers, so many of whom are now in the fruition of that intellectual beauty of which Emerson gave them both the desire and the foretaste, who will always love to repeat:—

> " Che in la mente m' è fitta, ed or m' accuora
> La cara e buona immagine paterna
> Di voi, quando nel mondo ad ora ad ora
> M' insegnavaste come l' uom s' eterna."

I am unconsciously thinking, as I write, of the third lecture of the present course, in which Mr. Emerson gave some delightful reminiscences of the intellectual influences in whose movement he had shared. It was like hearing Goethe read some passages of the "Wahrheit aus seinem Leben." Not that there was not a little *Dichtung*, too, here and there, as the lecturer built up so lofty a pedestal under certain figures as to lift them into a prominence of obscurity, and seem to mast-head them there. Everybody was asking his neighbour who this or that recondite great man was, in the faint hope that somebody might once have heard of him. There are those who call Mr. Emerson cold. Let them revise their judgment in presence of this loyalty of his that can keep warm for half a century, that never forgets a friendship, or fails to pay even a fancied obligation to the uttermost farthing. This substantiation of shadows was but incidental, and pleasantly characteristic of the man to those who know and love him. The greater part of the lecture was devoted to reminiscences of things substantial in themselves. He spoke of Everett, fresh from Greece and Germany; of Channing; of the translations of Margaret Fuller, Ripley, and Dwight: of the Dial and Brook Farm. To what he said of the latter an undertone of good-humoured irony gave special zest. But what every one of his hearers felt was that the protagonist in the drama was left out. The lecturer was no Æneas to babble the *quorum magna pars fui*, and, as one of his listeners, I cannot help wishing to say how each of them was commenting the story as it went along, and filling up the necessary gaps in it from his own private store of memories. His younger hearers could not know how much they owed to the benign impersonality, the quiet scorn of everything ignoble, the never-sated hunger of self-culture, that was personified in the man before them. But the older knew how much the

country's intellectual emancipation was due to the stimulus of his teaching and example, how constantly he had kept burning the beacon of an ideal life above our lower region of turmoil. To him more than to all other causes together did the young martyrs of our civil war owe the sustaining strength of thoughtful heroism that is so touching in every record of their lives. Those who are grateful to Mr. Emerson, as many of us are, for what they feel to be most valuable in their culture, or perhaps I should say their impulse, are grateful not so much for any direct teachings of his as for that inspiring lift which only genius can give, and without which all doctrine is chaff.

This was something like the *caret* which some of us older boys wished to fill up on the margin of the master's lecture. Few men have been so much to so many, and through so large a range of aptitudes and temperaments, and this simply because all of us value manhood beyond any or all other qualities of character. We may suspect in him, here and there, a certain thinness and vagueness of quality; but let the waters go over him as they list, this masculine fibre of his will keep its lively colour and its toughness of texture. I have heard some great speakers and some accomplished orators, but never any that so moved and persuaded men as he. There is a kind of undertow in that rich baritone of his that sweeps our minds from their foothold into deeper waters with a drift we cannot and would not resist. And how artfully (for Emerson is a long-studied artist in these things) does the deliberate utterance, that seems waiting for the fit word, seem to admit us partners in the labour of thought, and make us feel as if the glance of humour were a sudden suggestion, as if the perfect phrase lying written there on the desk were as unexpected to him as to us! In that closely-filed speech of his at the Burns centenary dinner every word seemed to have just dropped down to him from the clouds. He looked far away over the heads of his hearers, with a vague kind of expectation, as into some private heaven of invention, and the winged period came at last obedient to his spell. "My

dainty Ariel!" he seemed murmuring to himself as he cast down his eyes as if in deprecation of the frenzy of approval, and caught another sentence from the Sibylline leaves that lay before him ambushed behind a dish of fruit and seen only by nearest neighbours. Every sentence brought down the house as I never saw one brought down before—and it is not so easy to hit Scotsmen with a sentiment that has no hint of native brogue in it. I watched, for it was an interesting study, how the quick sympathy ran flashing from face to face down the long tables, like an electric spark thrilling as it went, and then exploded in a thunder of plaudits. I watched till tables and faces vanished, for I, too, found myself caught up in the common enthusiasm, and my excited fancy set me under the *bema* listening to him who fulmined over Greece. I can never help applying to him what Ben Jonson said of Bacon: "There happened in my time one noble speaker, who was full of gravity in his speaking. His language was nobly censorious. No man ever spake more neatly, more pressly, more weightily, or suffered less emptiness, less idleness, in what he uttered. No member of his speech but consisted of his own graces. His hearers could not cough, or look aside from him, without loss. He commanded where he spoke." Those who heard him while their natures were yet plastic, and their mental nerves trembled under the slightest breath of divine air, will never cease to feel and say:—

> "Was never eye did see that face,
> Was never ear did hear that tongue,
> Was never mind did mind his grace,
> That ever thought the travail long;
> But eyes, and ears, and every thought,
> Were with his sweet perfections caught."

# *CARLYLE.**

A FEELING of comical sadness is likely to come over the mind of any middle-aged man who sets himself to recollecting the names of different authors that have been famous, and the number of contemporary immortalities whose end he has seen since coming to manhood. Many a light, hailed by too careless observers as a fixed star, has proved to be only a short-lived lantern at the tail of a newspaper kite. That literary heaven which our youth saw dotted thick with rival glories, we find now to have been a stage-sky merely, artificially enkindled from behind; and the cynical daylight which is sure to follow all theatrical enthusiasms shows us ragged holes where once were luminaries, sheer vacany instead of lustre. Our earthly reputations, says a great poet, are the colour of grass, and the same sun that makes the green bleaches it again. But next morning is not the time to criticise the scene-painter's firmament, nor is it quite fair to examine coldly a part of some general illusion in the absence of that sympathetic enthusiasm, that self-surrender of the fancy, which made it what it was. It would not be safe for all neglected authors to comfort themselves in Wordsworth's fashion, inferring genius in an inverse proportion to public favour, and a high and solitary merit from the world's indifference. On the contrary, it would be more just to argue from popularity a certain amount of real value, though it may not be of that permanent quality which insures enduring fame. The contemporary world and Wordsworth were both half right. He undoubtedly owned and worked the richest vein of his period; but he offered to his contemporaries a heap of gold-bearing quartz where the baser mineral made the greater show, and the person must do his own crushing and smelting, with no guaranty but the bare word of the miner. It was not enough that certain bolder adventurers should now and then show a nugget in proof of the success of their venture.

* Apropos of his "Frederick the Great."

The gold of the poet must be refined, moulded, stamped with the image and superscription of his time, but with a beauty of design and finish that are of no time. The work must surpass the material. Wordsworth was wholly void of that shaping imagination which is the highest criterion of a poet.

Immediate popularity and lasting fame, then, would seem to be the result of different qualities, and not of mere difference in degree. It is safe to prophesy a certain durability of recognition for any author who gives evidence of intellectual force, in whatever kind, above the average amount. There are names in literary history which are only names; and the works associated with them, like Acts of Congress already agreed on in debate, are read by their titles and passed. What is it that insures what may be called living fame, so that a book shall be at once famous and read? What is it that relegates divine Cowley to that remote, uncivil Pontus of the "British Poets," and keeps garrulous Pepys within the cheery circle of the evening lamp and fire? Originality, eloquence, sense, imagination, not one of them is enough by itself, but only in some happy mixture and proportion. Imagination seems to possess in itself more of the antiseptic property than any other single quality; but, without less showy and more substantial allies, it can at best give only deathlessness, without the perpetual youth that makes it other than dreary. It were easy to find examples of this Tithonus immortality, setting its victims apart from both gods and men; helpless duration, undying, to be sure, but sapless and voiceless also, and long ago deserted by the fickle Hemera. And yet chance could confer that gift on Glaucus, which love and the consent of Zeus failed to secure for the darling of the Dawn. Is it mere luck, then? Luck may, and often does, have some share in ephemeral successes, as in a gambler's winnings spent as soon as got, but not in any lasting triumph over time. Solid success must be based on solid qualities and the honest culture of them.

The first element of contemporary popularity is undoubt-

edly the power of entertaining. If a man have anything to tell, the world cannot be expected to listen to him unless he have perfected himself in the best way of telling it. People are not to be argued into a pleasurable sensation, nor is taste to be compelled by any syllogism, however stringent. An author may make himself very popular, however, and even justly so, by appealing to the passion of the moment, without having anything in him that shall outlast the public whim which he satisfies. Churchill is a remarkable example of this. He had a surprising extemporary vigour of mind; his phrase carries great weight of blow; he undoubtedly surpassed all contemporaries, as Cowper says of him, in a certain rude and earth-born vigour; but his verse is dust and ashes now, solemnly inurned, of course, in the Chalmers columbarium, and without danger of violation. His brawn and muscle are fading traditions, while the fragile, shivering genius of Cowper is still a good life on the books of the Critical Insurance Office. "Is it not, then, loftiness of mind that puts one by the side of Virgil?" cries poor old Cavalcanti at his wits' end. Certainly not altogether that. There must be also the great Mantuan's art; his power, not only of being strong in parts, but of making those parts coherent in an harmonious whole, and tributary to it. Gray, if we may believe the commentators, has not an idea, scarcely an epithet, that he can call his own, and yet he is, in the best sense, one of the classics of English literature. He had exquisite felicity of choice; his dictionary had no vulgar word in it, no harsh one, but all culled from the luckiest moods of poets, and with a faint but delicious aroma of association; he had a perfect sense of sound, and one idea without which all the poetic outfit (*si absit prudentia*) is of little avail,—that of combination and arrangement, in short, of art. The poets from whom he helped himself have no more claim to any of his poems as wholes, than the various beauties of Greece (if the old story were true) to the Venus of the artist.

Imagination, as we have said, has more virtue to keep a

book alive than any other single faculty. Burke is rescued from the usual doom of orators because his learning, his experience, his sagacity are rimmed with a halo by this bewitching light behind the intellectual eye from the highest heaven of the brain. Shakespeare has impregnated his common sense with the steady glow of it, and answers the mood of youth and age, of high and low, immortal as that dateless substance of the soul he wrought in. To have any chance of lasting, a book must satisfy, not merely some fleeting fancy of the day, but a constant longing and hunger of human nature; and it needs only a superficial study of literature to be convinced that real fame depends rather on the sum of an author's powers than on any brilliancy of special parts. There must be wisdom as well as wit, sense no less than imagination, judgment in equal measure with fancy, and the fiery rocket must be bound fast to the poor wooden stick that gives it guidance if it would mount and draw all eyes. There are some who think that the brooding patience which a great work calls for belonged exclusively to an earlier period than ours. Others lay the blame on our fashion of periodical publication, which necessitates a sensation and a crisis in every number, and forces the writer to strive for startling effects, instead of that general lowness of tone which is the last achievement of the artist. The simplicity of antique passion, the homeliness of antique pathos, seem not merely to be gone out of fashion, but out of being as well. Modern poets appear rather to tease their words into a fury, than to infuse them with the deliberate heats of their matured conception, and strive to replace the rapture of the mind with a fervid intensity of phrase. Our reaction from the decorous platitudes of the last century has no doubt led us to excuse this, and to be thankful for something like real fire, though of stubble; but our prevailing style of criticism, which regards parts rather than wholes, which dwells on the beauty of passages, and, above all, must have its languid nerves pricked with the expected sensation at whatever cost, has done all it could to confirm us in our evil

way. Passages are good when they lead to something, when they are necessary parts of the building, but they are not good to dwell in. This taste for the startling reminds us of something which happened once at the burning of a country meeting-house. The building stood on a hill, and, apart from any other considerations, the fire was as picturesque as could be desired. When all was a black heap, licking itself here and there with tongues of fire, there rushed up a farmer, gasping anxiously, "Hez the bell fell yit?" An ordinary fire was no more to him than that on his hearth-stone; even the burning of a meeting-house, in itself a vulcanic rarity (so long as he was of another parish), could not tickle his out-worn palate; but he had hoped for a certain *tang* in the downcome of the bell that might recall the boyish flavour of conflagration. There was something dramatic, no doubt, in this surprise of the brazen sentinel at his post, but the breathless rustic has always seemed to us a type of the prevailing delusion in æsthetics. Alas! if the bell must fall in every stanza or every monthly number, how shall an author contrive to stir us at last, unless with whole Moscows, crowned with the tintinnabulary crash of the Kremlin? For ourselves, we are glad to feel that we are still able to find contentment in the more conversational and domestic tone of our old-fashioned wood-fire. No doubt a great part of our pleasure in reading is unexpectedness, whether in turn of thought or of phrase; but an emphasis out of place, an intensity of expression not founded on sincerity of moral or intellectual conviction, reminds one of the underscorings in young ladies' letters, a wonder even to themselves under the colder north-light of matronage. It is the part of the critic, however, to keep cool under whatever circumstances, and to reckon that the excesses of an author will be at first more attractive to the many than that average power which shall win him attention with a new generation of men. It is seldom found out by the majority, till after a considerable interval, that he was the original man who contrived to be simply natural—the hardest lesson in the school of art, and the latest learned, if, indeed, it be

a thing capable of acquisition at all. The most winsome and wayward of brooks draws now and then some lover's foot to its intimate reserve, while the spirt of a bursting water-pipe gathers a gaping crowd forthwith.

Mr. Carlyle is an author who has now been so long before the world that we may feel toward him something of the unprejudice of posterity. It has long been evident that he has no more ideas to bestow upon us, and that no new turn of his kaleidoscope would give us anything but some variation of arrangement in the brilliant colours of his style It is perhaps possible, then, to arrive at some not wholly inadequate estimate of his place as a writer, and especially of the value of the ideas whose advocate he makes himself, with a bitterness and violence that increase, as it seems to us, in proportion as his inward conviction of their truth diminishes.

The leading characteristics of an author who is in any sense original, that is to say, who does not merely reproduce, but modifies the influence of tradition, culture, and contemporary thought upon himself by some admixture of his own, may commonly be traced more or less clearly in his earliest works. This is more strictly true, no doubt, of poets, because the imagination is a fixed quantity, not to be increased by any amount of study and reflection. Skill, wisdom, and even wit are cumulative; but that diviner faculty, which is the spiritual eye, though it may be trained and sharpened, cannot be added to by taking thought. This has always been something innate, unaccountable, to be laid to a happy conjunction of the stars. Goethe, the last of the *great* poets, accordingly takes pains to tell us under what planets he was born; and in him it is curious how uniform the imaginative quality is from the beginning to the end of his long literary activity. His early poems show maturity, his mature ones a youthful freshness. The apple already lies potentially in the blossom, as that may be traced also in the ripened fruit. With a mere change of emphasis, Goethe might be called an old boy at both ends of his career.

In the earliest authorship of Mr. Carlyle we find some not obscure hints of the future man. Nearly fifty years ago he contributed a few literary and critical articles to the Edinburgh Encyclopædia. The outward fashion of them is that of the period; but they are distinguished by a certain security of judgment remarkable at any time, remarkable especially in one so young. British criticism has been always more or less parochial; has never, indeed, quite freed itself from sectarian cant, and planted itself honestly on the æsthetic point of view. It cannot quite persuade itself that truth is of immortal essence, totally independent of all assistance from quarterly journals or the British army and navy. Carlyle, in these first essays, already shows the influence of his master, Goethe, the most widely receptive of critics. In a compact notice of Montaigne, there is not a word as to his religious scepticism. The character is looked at purely from its human and literary sides. As illustrating the bent of the author's mind, the following passage is most to our purpose: "A modern reader will not easily cavil at the patient and good-natured, though exuberant egotism which brings back to our view 'the form and pressure' of a time long past. *The habits and humours, the mode of acting and thinking, which characterized a Gascon gentleman in the sixteenth century, cannot fail to amuse an inquirer of the nineteenth; while the faithful delineation of human feelings, in all their strength and weakness, will serve as a mirror to every mind capable of self-examination.*" We find here no uncertain indication of that eye for the moral picturesque, and that sympathetic appreciation of character, which within the next few years were to make Carlyle the first in insight of English critics and the most vivid of English historians. In all his earlier writing he never loses sight of his master's great rule, *Den Gegenstand fest zu halten.* He accordingly gave to Englishmen the first humanly possible likeness of Voltaire, Diderot, Mirabeau, and others, who had hitherto been measured by the usual British standard of their respect for the geognosy of Moses and the historic credibility of the Books of

Chronicles. What was the real meaning of this phenomenon? what the amount of this man's honest performance in the world? and in what does he show that family likeness, common to all the sons of Adam, which gives us a fair hope of being able to comprehend him? These were the questions which Carlyle seems to have set himself honestly to answer in the critical writings which fill the first period of his life as a man of letters. In this mood he rescued poor Boswell from the unmerited obloquy of an ungrateful generation, and taught us to see something half-comically beautiful in the poor, weak creature, with his pathetic instinct of reverence for what was nobler, wiser, and stronger than himself. Everything that Mr. Carlyle wrote during this first period thrills with the purest appreciation of whatever is brave and beautiful in human nature, with the most vehement scorn of cowardly compromise with things base; and yet, immitigable as his demand for the highest in us seems to be, there is always something reassuring in the humorous sympathy with mortal frailty which softens condemnation and consoles for shortcoming. The remarkable feature of Mr. Carlyle's criticism (see, for example, his analysis and exposition of Goethe's "Helena") is the sleuth-hound instinct with which he presses on to the *matter* of his theme—never turned aside by a false scent, regardless of the outward beauty of form, sometimes almost contemptuous of it, in his hunger after the intellectual nourishment which it may hide. The delicate skeleton of admirably articulated and related parts which underlies and sustains every true work of art, and keeps it from sinking on itself a shapeless heap, he would crush remorselessly to come at the marrow of meaning. With him the ideal sense is secondary to the ethical and metaphysical, and he has but a faint conception of their possible unity.

By degrees the humorous element in his nature gains ground, till it overmasters all the rest. Becoming always more boisterous and obtrusive, it ends at last, as such humour must, in cynicism. In "Sartor Resartus" it is still kindly, still infused with sentiment; and the book,

with its mixture of indignation and farce, strikes one as might the prophecies of Jeremiah, if the marginal comments of the Rev. Mr. Sterne in his wildest mood had by some accident been incorporated with the text. In "Sartor" the marked influence of Jean Paul is undeniable, both in matter and manner. It is curious for one who studies the action and reaction of national literatures on each other, to see the humour of Swift and Sterne and Fielding, after filtering through Richter, reappear in Carlyle with a tinge of Germanism that makes it novel, alien, or even displeasing, as the case may be, to the English mind. Unhappily the bit of *mother* from Swift's vinegar-barrel has had strength enough to sour all the rest. The whimsicality of "Tristram Shandy," which, even in the original, has too often the effect of forethought, becomes a deliberate artifice in Richter, and at last a mere mannerism in Carlyle.

Mr. Carlyle in his critical essays had the advantage of a well-defined theme, and of limits both in the subject and in the space allowed for its treatment, which kept his natural extravagance within bounds, and compelled some sort of discretion and compactness. The great merit of these essays lay in a criticism based on wide and various study, which, careless of tradition, applied its standard to the real and not the contemporary worth of the literary or other performance to be judged, and in an unerring eye for that fleeting expression of the moral features of character, a perception of which alone makes the drawing of a coherent likeness possible. Their defect was a tendency, gaining strength with years, to confound the moral with the æsthetic standard, and to make the value of an author's work dependent on the general force of his nature rather than on his special fitness for a given task. In proportion as his humour gradually overbalanced the other qualities of his mind, his taste for the eccentric, amorphous, and violent in men became excessive, disturbing more and more his perception of the more commonplace attributes which give consistency to portraiture. His "French Revolution" is a series of lurid pictures, unmatched for vehement power, in

which the figures of such sons of earth as Mirabeau and Danton loom gigantic and terrible as in the glare of an eruption, their shadows swaying far and wide, grotesquely awful. But all is painted by eruption-flashes in violent light and shade. There are no half-tints, no gradations, and we find it impossible to account for the continuance in power of less Titanic actors in the tragedy like Robespierre, on any theory, whether of human nature or of individual character, supplied by Mr. Carlyle. Of his success, however, in accomplishing what he aimed at, which was to haunt the mind with memories of a horrible political nightmare, there can be no doubt.

Goethe says, apparently thinking of Richter, "the worthy Germans have persuaded themselves that the essence of true humour is formlessness." Heine had not yet shown that a German might combine the most airy humour with a sense of form as delicate as Goethe's own, and that there was no need to borrow the bow of Philoctetes for all kinds of game. Mr. Carlyle's own tendency was toward the lawless, and the attraction of Jean Paul made it an overmastering one. Goethe, we think, might have gone farther, and affirmed that nothing but the highest artistic sense can prevent humour from degenerating into the grotesque, and thence downwards to utter anarchy. Rabelais is a striking example of it. The moral purpose of his book cannot give it that unity which the instinct and forethought of art only can bring forth. Perhaps we owe the masterpiece of humorous literature to the fact that Cervantes had been trained to authorship in a school where form predominated over substance, and the most convincing proof of the supremacy of art at the highest period of Greek literature is to be found in Aristophanes. Mr. Carlyle has no artistic sense of form or rhythm, scarcely of proportion. Accordingly he looks on verse with contempt as something barbarous—a savage ornament which a higher refinement will abolish, as it has tattooing and nose-rings. With a conceptive imagination vigorous beyond any in his generation, with a mastery of

language equalled only by the greatest poets, he wants altogether the plastic imagination, the shaping faculty, which would have made him a poet in the highest sense. He is a preacher and a prophet—anything you will—but an artist he is not, and never can be. It is always the knots and gnarls of the oak that he admires, never the perfect and balanced tree.

It is certainly more agreeable to be grateful for what we owe an author, than to blame him for what he cannot give us. But it is sometimes the business of a critic to trace faults of style and of thought to their root in character and temperament—to show their necessary relation to, and dependence on, each other—and to find some more trustworthy explanation than mere wantonness of will for the moral obliquities of a man so largely moulded and gifted as Mr. Carlyle. So long as he was merely an exhorter or dehorter, we were thankful for such eloquence, such humour, such vivid or grotesque images, and such splendour of illustration as only he could give; but when he assumes to be a teacher of moral and political philosophy, when he himself takes to compounding the social panaceas he has made us laugh at so often, and advertises none as genuine but his own, we begin to inquire into his qualifications and his defects, and to ask ourselves whether his patent pill differs from others except in the larger amount of aloes, or has any better recommendation than the superior advertising powers of a mountebank of genius. Comparative criticism teaches us that moral and æsthetic defects are more nearly related than is commonly supposed. Had Mr. Carlyle been fitted out completely by nature as an artist, he would have had an ideal in his work which would have lifted his mind away from the muddier part of him, and trained him to the habit of seeking and seeing the harmony rather than the discord and contradiction of things. His innate love of the picturesque (which is only another form of the sentimentalism he so scoffs at, perhaps as feeling it a weakness in himself) once turned in the direction of character, and finding its chief satisfaction

there, led him to look for that ideal of human nature in individual men which is but fragmentarily represented in the entire race, and is rather divined from the aspiration, for ever disenchanted to be for ever renewed, of the immortal part in us, than found in any example of actual achievement. A wiser temper would have found something more consoling than disheartening in the continual failure of men eminently endowed to reach the standard of this spiritual requirement, would perhaps have found in it an inspiring hint that it is mankind, and not special men, that are to be shaped at last into the image of God, and that the endless life of the generations may hope to come nearer that goal of which the short-breathed threescore years and ten fall too unhappily short.

But Mr. Carlyle has invented the Hero-cure, and all who recommend any other method, or see any hope of healing elsewhere, are either quacks and charlatans or their victims. His lively imagination conjures up the image of an impossible he, as contradictorily endowed as the chief personage in a modern sentimental novel, and who, at all hazards, must not lead mankind like a shepherd, but bark, bite, and otherwise worry them toward the fold like a truculent sheep-dog. If Mr. Carlyle would only now and then recollect that men are men, and not sheep—nay, that the farther they are from being such, the more well grounded our hope of one day making something better of them! It is indeed strange that one who values Will so highly in the greatest, should be blind to its infinite worth in the least of men; nay, that he should so often seem to confound it with its irritable and purposeless counterfeit, Wilfulness. The natural impatience of an imaginative temperament, which conceives so vividly the beauty and desirableness of a nobler manhood and a diviner political order, makes him fret at the slow moral processes by which the All-Wise brings about his ends and turns the very foolishness of men to his praise and glory. Mr. Carlyle is for calling down fire from Heaven whenever he cannot readily lay his hand on the match-box. No doubt it is somewhat provoking

that it should be so easy to build castles in the air, and so hard to find tenants for them. It is a singular intellectual phenomenon to see a man, who earlier in life so thoroughly appreciated the innate weakness and futile tendency of the "storm and thrust" period of German literature, constantly assimilating, as he grows older, more and more nearly to its principles and practice. It is no longer the sagacious and moderate Goethe who is his type of what is highest in human nature, but far rather some Götz of the Iron Hand, some assertor of the divine legitimacy of *Faustrecht*. It is odd to conceive the fate of Mr. Carlyle under the sway of any of his heroes—how Cromwell would have scorned him as a babbler more long-winded than Prynne, but less clear and practical—how Friedrich would have scoffed at his tirades as *dummes Zeug* not to be compared with the romances of Crébillon *fils*, or possibly have clapped him in a marching regiment as a fit subject for the cane of the sergeant. Perhaps something of Mr. Carlyle's irritability is to be laid to the account of his early schoolmastership at Ecclefechan. This great booby World is such a dull boy, and will not learn the lesson we have taken such pains in expounding for the fiftieth time. Well, then, if eloquence, if example, if the awful warning of other little boys who neglected their accidence and came to the gallows, if none of these avail, the birch at least is left, and we will try that. The dominie spirit has become every year more obtrusive and intolerant in Mr. Carlyle's writing, and the rod, instead of being kept in its place as a resource for desperate cases, has become the alpha and omega of all successful training, the one divinely-appointed means of human enlightenment and progress—in short, the final hope of that absurd animal who fancies himself a little lower that the angels. Have we feebly taken it for granted that the distinction of man was reason? Never was there a more fatal misconception. It is in the gift of unreason that we are unenviably distinguished from the brutes, whose nobler privilege of instinct saves them from our blunders and our crimes.

But since Mr. Carlyle has become possessed with the

hallucination that he is head-master of this huge boys' school which we call the world, his pedagogic birch has grown to the taller proportions and more ominous aspect of a gallows. His article on Dr. Francia was a panegyric of the halter, in which the gratitude of mankind is invoked for the self-appointed dictator who had discovered in Paraguay a tree more beneficent than that which produced the Jesuit's bark. Mr. Carlyle seems to be in the condition of a man who uses stimulants, and must increase his dose from day to day as the senses become dulled under the spur. He began by admiring strength of character and purpose, and the manly self-denial which makes a humble fortune great by steadfast loyalty to duty. He has gone on till mere strength has become such washy weakness that there is no longer any titillation in it; and nothing short of downright violence will rouse his nerves now to the needed excitement. At first he made out very well with remarkable men; then, lessening the water and increasing the spirit, he took to Heroes; and now he must have downright *in*humanity, or the draught has no savour; so he gets on at last to Kings, types of remorseless Force, who maintain the political views of Berserkers by the legal principles of Lynch. Constitutional monarchy is a failure, representative government is a gabble, democracy a birth of the bottomless pit; there is no hope for mankind except in getting themselves under a good driver who shall not spare the lash. And yet, unhappily for us, these drivers are providential births not to be contrived by any cunning of ours, and Friedrich II. is hitherto the last of them. Meanwhile the world's wheels have got fairly stalled in mire and other matter of every vilest consistency and disgustful smell. What are we to do? Mr. Carlyle will not let us make a lever with a rail from the next fence, or call in the neighbours. That would be too commonplace and cowardly, too anarchical. No; he would have us sit down beside him in the slough, and shout lustily for Hercules. If that indispensable demigod will not or cannot come, we can find a useful and instructive solace, during the intervals of

shouting, in a hearty abuse of human nature, which, at the long last, is always to blame.

Since "Sartor Resartus" Mr. Carlyle has done little but repeat himself with increasing emphasis and heightened shrillness. Warning has steadily heaten toward denunciation, and remonstrance soured toward scolding. The image of the Tartar prayer-mill, which he borrowed from Richter and turned to such humorous purpose, might be applied to himself. The same phrase comes round and round, only the machine, being a little crankier, rattles more, and the performer is called on for a more visible exertion. If there be not something very like cant in Mr. Carlyle's later writings, then cant is not the repetition of a creed after it has become a phrase by the cooling of that white-hot conviction which once made it both the light and warmth of the soul. We do not mean intentional and deliberate cant, but neither is that which Mr. Carlyle denounces so energetically in his fellow-men of that conscious kind. We do not mean to blame him for it, but mention it rather as an interesting phenomenon of human nature. The stock of ideas which mankind has to work with is very limited, like the alphabet, and can at best have an air of freshness given it by new arrangements and combinations, or by application to new times and circumstances. Montaigne is but Ecclesiastes writing in the sixteenth century, Voltaire but Lucian in the eighteenth. Yet both are original, and so certainly is Mr. Carlyle, whose borrowing is mainly from his own former works. But he does this so often and so openly that we may at least be sure that he ceased growing a number of years ago, and is a remarkable example of arrested development.

The cynicism, however, which has now become the prevailing temper of his mind, has gone on expanding with unhappy vigour. In Mr. Carlyle it is not, certainly, as in Swift, the result of personal disappointment, and of the fatal eye of an accomplice for the mean qualities by which power could be attained that it might be used for purposes as mean. It seems rather the natural corruption of his

exuberant humour. Humour in its first analysis is a perception of the incongruous, and, in its highest development, of the incongruity between the actual and the ideal in men and life. With so keen a sense of the ludicrous contrast between what men might be, nay, wish to be, and what they are, and with a vehement nature that demands the instant realisation of his vision of a world altogether heroic, it is no wonder that Mr. Carlyle, always hoping for a thing and always disappointed, should become bitter Perhaps if he expected less he would find more. Saul seeking his father's asses found himself turned suddenly into a king; but Mr. Carlyle, on the look-out for a king, always seems to find the other sort of animal. He sees nothing on any side of him but a procession of the Lord of Misrule—in gloomier moments, a Dance of Death, where everything is either a parody of whatever is noble, or an aimless jig that stumbles at last into the annihilation of the grave, and so passes from one nothing to another. Is a world, then, which buys and reads Mr. Carlyle's works distinguished only for its "fair, large ears?" If he who has read and remembered so much would only now and then call to mind the old proverb, *Nec deus, nec lupus, sed homo!* If he would only recollect that, from the days of the first grandfather, everybody has remembered a golden age behind him!

The very qualities, it seems to us, which came so near making a great poet of Mr. Carlyle, disqualify him for the office of historian. The poet's concern is with the appearances of things, with their harmony in that whole which the imagination demands for its satisfaction, and their truth to that ideal nature which is the proper object of poetry. History, unfortunately, is very far from being ideal, still farther from an exclusive interest in those heroic or typical figures which answer all the wants of the epic and the drama and fill their utmost artistic limits. Mr. Carlyle has an unequalled power and vividness in painting detached scenes, in bringing out in their full relief the oddities or peculiarities of character; but he has a far

feebler sense of those gradual changes of opinion, that strange communication of sympathy from mind to mind, that subtile influence of very subordinate actors in giving a direction to policy or action, which we are wont somewhat vaguely to call the progress of events. His scheme of history is purely an epical one, where only leading figures appear by name and are in any strict sense operative. He has no conception of the people as anything else than an element of mere brute force in political problems, and would sniff scornfully at that unpicturesque common-sense of the many, which comes slowly to its conclusions, no doubt, but compels obedience even from rulers the most despotic when once its mind is made up. His history of Frederick is, of course, a Fritziad; but next to his hero, the cane of the drill-sergeant and iron ramrods appear to be the conditions which to his mind satisfactorily account for the result of the Seven Years War. It is our opinion, which subsequent events seem to justify, that, had there not been in the Prussian people a strong instinct of nationality, Protestant nationality too, and an intimate conviction of its advantages, the war might have ended quite otherwise. Frederick II. left the machine of war which he received from his father even more perfect than he found it, yet within a few years of his death it went to pieces before the shock of French armies animated by an idea. Again a few years, and the Prussian soldiery, inspired once more by the old national fervour, were victorious. Were it not for the purely picturesque bias of Mr. Carlyle's genius, for the necessity which his epical treatment lays upon him of always having a protagonist, we should be astonished that an idealist like him should have so little faith in ideas and so much in matter.

Mr. Carlyle's manner is not so well suited to the historian as to the essayist. He is always great in single figures and striking episodes, but there is neither gradation nor continuity. He has extraordinary patience and conscientiousness in the gathering and sifting of his material, but is scornful of commonplace facts and characters,

impatient of whatever will not serve for one of his clever sketches, or group well in a more elaborate figure-piece. He sees history, as it were, by flashes of lightning. A single scene, whether a landscape or an interior, a single figure or a wild mob of men, whatever may be snatched by the eye in that instant of intense illumination, is minutely photographed upon the memory. Every tree and stone, almost every blade of grass; every article of furniture in a room; the attitude or expression, nay, the very buttons and shoe-ties of a principal figure; the gestures of momentary passion in a wild throng,—everything leaps into vision under that sudden glare with a painful distinctness that leaves the retina quivering. The intervals are absolute darkness. Mr. Carlyle makes us acquainted with the isolated spot where we happen to be when the flash comes, as if by actual eyesight, but there is no possibility of a comprehensive view. No other writer compares with him for vividness. He is himself a witness, and makes us witnesses of whatever he describes. This is genius beyond a question, and of a very rare quality, but it is not history. He has not the cold-blooded impartiality of the historian; and while he entertains us, moves us to tears or laughter, makes us the unconscious captives of his ever-changeful mood, we find that he has taught us comparatively little. His imagination is so powerful that it makes him the contemporary of his characters, and thus his history seems to be the memoirs of a cynical humorist, with hearty likes and dislikes, with something of acridity in his partialities whether for or against, more keenly sensitive to the grotesque than the simply natural, and who enters in his diary, even of what comes within the range of his own observation, only so much as amuses his fancy, is congenial with his humour, or feeds his prejudice. Mr. Carlyle's method is accordingly altogether pictorial, his hasty temper making narrative wearisome to him. In his Friedrich, for example, we get very little notion of the civil administration of Prussia; and when he comes, in the last volume, to his hero's dealings with civil reforms, he confesses candidly

that it would tire him too much to tell us about it, even if he knew anything at all satisfactory himself.

Mr. Carlyle's historical compositions are wonderful prose poems, full of picture, incident, humour, and character, where we grow familiar with his conception of certain leading personages, and even of subordinate ones, if they are necessary to the scene, so that they come out living upon the stage from the dreary limbo of names; but this is no more history than the historical plays of Shakespeare. There is nothing in imaginative literature superior in its own way to the episode of Voltaire in the Fritziad. It is delicious in humour, masterly in minute characterisation. We feel as if the principal victim (for we cannot help feeling all the while that he is so) of this mischievous genius had been put upon the theatre before us by some perfect mimic like Foote, who had studied his habitual gait, gestures, tones, turn of thought, costume, trick of feature, and rendered them with the slight dash of caricature needful to make the whole composition tell. It is in such things that Mr. Carlyle is beyond all rivalry, and that we must go back to Shakespeare for a comparison. But the mastery of Shakespeare is shown perhaps more strikingly in his treatment of the ordinary than of the exceptional. His is the gracious equality of Nature herself. Mr. Carlyle's gift is rather in the representation than in the evolution of character; and it is a necessity of his art, therefore, to exaggerate slightly his heroic, and to caricature in like manner his comic parts. His appreciation is less psychological than physical and external. Grimm relates that Garrick, riding once with Préville, proposed to him that they should counterfeit drunkenness. They rode through Passy accordingly, deceiving all who saw them. When beyond the town Préville asked how he had succeeded. "Excellently," said Garrick, "as to your body; but your legs were not tipsy." Mr. Carlyle would be as exact in his observation of nature as the great actor, and would make us *see* a drunken man as well; but we doubt whether he could have conceived that unmatchable scene

in Antony and Cleopatra, where the tipsiness of Lepidus pervades the whole metaphysical no less than the physical part of the triumvir. If his sympathies bore any proportion to his instinct for catching those traits which are the expression of character, but not character itself, we might have had a great historian in him instead of a history-painter. But that which is a main element in Mr. Carlyle's talent, and does perhaps more than anything else to make it effective, is a defect of his nature. The cynicism which renders him so entertaining precludes him from any just conception of men and their motives, and from any sane estimate of the relative importance of the events which concern them. We remember a picture of Hamon's, where before a Punch's theatre are gathered the wisest of mankind in rapt attention. Socrates sits on a front bench, absorbed in the spectacle, and in the corner stands Dante making entries in his note-book. Mr. Carlyle as an historian leaves us in somewhat such a mood. The world is a puppet-show, and when we have watched the play out, we depart with a half-comic consciousness of the futility of all human enterprise, and the ludicrousness of all man's action and passion on the stage of the world. Simple, kindly, blundering Oliver Goldsmith was after all wiser, and his Vicar, ideal as Hector and not less immortal, is a demonstration of the perennial beauty and heroism of the homeliest human nature. The cynical view is congenial to certain moods, and is so little inconsistent with original nobleness of mind, that it is not seldom the acetous fermentation of it; but it is the view of the satirist, not of the historian, and takes in but a narrow arc in the circumference of truth. Cynicism in itself is essentially disagreeable. It is the intellectual analogue of the truffle; and though it may be very well in giving a relish to thought for certain palates, it cannot supply the substance of it. Mr. Carlyle's cynicism is not that polished weariness of the outsides of life which we find in Ecclesiastes. It goes much deeper than that, to the satisfactions, not of the body or the intellect, but of the very soul itself. It vaunts itself; it is

noisy and aggressive. What the wise master puts into the mouth of desperate ambition, thwarted of the fruit of its crime, as the fitting expression of passionate sophistry, seems to have become an article of his creed. With him

> "Life *is* a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing."

He goes about with his Diogenes dark-lantern, professing to seek a man, but inwardly resolved to find a monkey. He loves to flash it suddenly on poor human nature in some ridiculous or degrading posture. He admires still, or keeps affirming that he admires, the doughty, silent, hard-working men who, like Cromwell, go honestly about their business; but when we come to his later examples, we find that it is not loyalty to duty or to an inward ideal of high-mindedness that he finds admirable in them, but a blind unquestioning vassalage to whomsoever it has pleased him to set up for a hero. He would fain replace the old-feudalism with a spiritual counterpart, in which there shall be an obligation to soul-service. He who once popularised the word *flunkey* by ringing the vehement changes of his scorn upon it, is at last forced to conceive an ideal flunkeyism to squire the hectoring Don Belianises of his fancy about the world. Failing this, his latest theory of Divine government seems to be the cudgel. Poets have sung all manner of vegetable loves: Petrarch has celebrated the laurel, Chaucer the daisy, and Wordsworth the gallows-tree; it remained for the ex-pedagogue of Ecclefechan to become the volunteer laureate of the rod, and to imagine a world created and directed by a divine Dr. Busby. We cannot help thinking that Mr. Carlyle might have learned something to his advantage by living a few years in the democracy which he scoffs at as heartily *a priori* as if it were the demagogism which Aristophanes derided from experience. The Hero, as Mr. Carlyle understands him, was a makeshift of the past; and the ideal of manhood is to be found hereafter in free communities, where the state shall at length sum up and exemplify in itself all those qualities which poets were forced to imagine

and typify because they could not find them in the actual world.

In the earlier part of his literary career, Mr. Carlyle was the denouncer of shams, the preacher up of sincerity, manliness, and of a living faith, instead of a droning ritual. He had intense convictions, and he made disciples. With a compass of diction unequalled by any other public performer of the time, ranging as it did from the unbooked freshness of the Scottish peasant to the most far-sought phrase of literary curiosity, with humour, pathos, and eloquence at will, it was no wonder that he found eager listeners in a world longing for a sensation, and forced to put up with the West-End gospel of "Pelham." If not a profound thinker, he had what was next best—he felt profoundly, and his cry came out of the depths. The stern Calvinism of his early training was rekindled by his imagination to the old fervour of Wishart and Brown, and became a new phenomenon as he reproduced it subtilised by German transcendentalism and German culture. Imagination, if it lays hold of a Scotsman, possesses him in the old demoniac sense of the word, and that hard logical nature, if the Hebrew fire once gets fair headway in it, burns unquenchable as an anthracite coal-mine. But to utilise these sacred heats, to employ them, as a literary man is always tempted, to keep the domestic pot a-boiling—is such a thing possible? Only too possible, we fear; and Mr. Carlyle is an example of it. If the languid public long for a sensation, the excitement of making one becomes also a necessity of the successful author, as the intellectual nerves grow duller and the old inspiration that came unbidden to the bare garret grows shier and shier of the comfortable parlour. As he himself said thirty years ago of Edward Irving, "Unconsciously, for the most part in deep unconsciousness, there was now the impossibility to live neglected —to walk on the quiet paths where alone it is well with us. Singularity must henceforth succeed singularity. O foulest Circean draught, thou poison of Popular Applause! madness is in thee and death; thy end is Bedlam and the grave." Mr. Carlyle won his first successes as a kind of preacher in

print. His fervour, his oddity of manner, his pugnacious paradox, drew the crowd; the truth, or, at any rate, the faith that underlay them all, brought also the fitter audience, though fewer. But the curse was upon him; he must attract, he must astonish. Thenceforth he has done nothing but revamp his telling things; but the oddity has become always odder, the paradoxes more paradoxical. No very large share of truth falls to the apprehension of any one man; let him keep it sacred, and beware of repeating it till it turn to falsehood on his lips by becoming ritual. Truth always has a bewitching savour of newness in it, and novelty at the first taste recalls that original sweetness to the tongue; but alas for him who would make the one a substitute for the other! We seem to miss of late in Mr. Carlyle the old sincerity. He has become the purely literary man, less concerned about what he says than about how he shall say it to best advantage. The muse should be the companion, not the guide, says he whom Mr. Carlyle has pronounced "the wisest of this generation." What would be a virtue in the poet is a vice of the most fatal kind in the teacher, and, alas that we should say it! the very Draco of shams, whose code contained no penalty milder than capital for the most harmless of them, has become at last something very like a sham himself. Mr. Carlyle continues to be a voice crying in the wilderness, but no longer a voice with any earnest conviction behind it. Hearing him rebuke us for being humbugs and impostors, we are inclined to answer, with the ambassador of Philip II., when his master reproached him with forgetting substance in ceremony, "Your Majesty forgets that you are only a ceremony yourself." And Mr. Carlyle's teaching, moreover—if teaching we may call it—belongs to what the great German, whose disciple he is, condemned as the "literature of despair." An apostle to the Gentiles might hope for some fruit of his preaching; but of what avail an apostle who shouts his message down the mouth of the pit to poor lost souls, whom he can positively assure only that it is impossible to get out? Mr. Carlyle lights up the

lanterns of his Pharos after the ship is already rolling between the tongue of the sea and the grinders of the reef. It is very brilliant, and its revolving flashes touch the crests of the breakers with an awful picturesqueness; but in so desperate a state of things, even Dr. Syntax might be pardoned for being forgetful of the picturesque. The Toryism of Scott sprang from love of the past; that of Carlyle is far more dangerously infectious, for it is logically deduced from a deep disdain of human nature.

Browning has drawn a beautiful picture of an old king sitting at the gate of his palace to judge his people in the calm sunshine of that past which never existed outside a poet's brain. It is the sweetest of waking dreams, this of absolute power and perfect wisdom in one supreme ruler; but it is as pure a creation of human want and weakness, as clear a witness of mortal limitation and incompleteness, as the shoes of swiftness, the cloak of darkness, the purse of Fortunatus, and the *elixir vitæ*. It is the natural refuge of imaginative temperaments impatient of our blunders and shortcomings, and, given a complete man, all would submit to the divine right of his despotism. But alas! to every the most fortunate human birth hobbles up that malign fairy who has been forgotten with her fatal gift of imperfection! So far as our experience has gone, it has been the very opposite of Mr. Carlyle's. Instead of finding men disloyal to their natural leader, nothing has ever seemed to us so touching as the gladness with which they follow him, when they are sure they have found him at last. But a natural leader of the ideal type is not to be looked for *nisi dignus vindice nodus*. The Divine Forethought had been cruel in furnishing one for every petty occasion, and thus thwarting in all inferior men that priceless gift of reason, to develop which, and to make it one with free-will, is the highest use of our experience on earth. Mr. Carlyle was hard bestead and very far gone in his idolatry of mere *pluck*, when he was driven to choose Friedrich as a hero. A poet—and Mr. Carlyle is nothing else—is unwise who yokes Pegasus to a prosaic theme

which no force of wing can lift from the dull earth. Charlemagne would have been a wiser choice, far enough in the past for ideal treatment, more manifestly the Siegfried of Anarchy, and in his rude way the refounder of that empire which is the ideal of despotism in the Western world.

Friedrich was doubtless a remarkable man, but surely very far below any lofty standard of heroic greatness. He was the last of the European kings who could look upon his kingdom as a private patrimony; and it was this estate of his, this piece of property, which he so obstinately and successfully defended. He had no idea of country as it was understood by an ancient Greek or Roman, as it is understood by a modern Englishman or American; and there is something almost pitiful in seeing a man of genius like Mr. Carlyle fighting painfully over again those battles of the last century which settled nothing but the continuance of the Prussian monarchy, while he saw only the "burning of a dirty chimney" in the war which a great people was waging under his very eyes for the idea of nationality and orderly magistrature, and which fixed, let us hope for ever, a boundary-line on the map of history and man's advancement toward self-conscious and responsible freedom. The true historical genius, to our thinking, is that which can see the nobler meaning of events that are near him, as the true poet is he who detects the divine in the casual; and we somewhat suspect the depth of his insight into the past who cannot recognise the godlike of to-day under that disguise in which it always visits us. Shall we hint to Mr. Carlyle that a man may look on an heroic age, as well as an heroic master, with the eyes of a valet, as misappreciative certainly, though not so ignoble?

What Goethe says of a great poet, that he must be a citizen of his age as well as of his country, may be said inversely of a great king. He should be a citizen of his country as well as his age. Friedrich was certainly the latter in its fullest sense; whether he was, or could have

been, the former, in any sense, may be doubted. The man who spoke and wrote French in preference to his mother-tongue, who, dying when Goethe was already drawing toward his fortieth year, Schiller toward his thirtieth, and Lessing had been already five years in his grave, could yet see nothing but barbarism in German literature, had little of the old Teutonic fibre in his nature. The man who pronounced the Nibelungen Lied not worth a pinch of priming, had little conception of the power of heroic traditions in making heroic men, and especially in strengthening that instinct made up of so many indistinguishable associations which we call love of country. Charlemagne, when he caused the old songs of his people to be gathered and written down, showed a truer sense of the sources of national feeling and a deeper political insight. This want of sympathy points to the somewhat narrow limits of Friedrich's nature. In spite of Mr. Carlyle's adroit statement of the case—and the whole book has an air of being the plea of a masterly advocate in mitigation of sentence—we feel that his hero was essentially hard, narrow, and selfish. His popularity will go for little with any one who has studied the trifling and often fabulous elements that make up that singular compound. A bluntness of speech, a shabby uniform, a frugal camp equipage, a timely familiarity, may make a man the favourite of an army or a nation—above all, if he have the knack of success. Moreover, popularity is much more easily won from above downward, and is bought at a better bargain by kings and generals than by other men. We doubt if Friedrich would have been liked as a private person, or even as an unsuccessful king. He apparently attached very few people to himself, fewer even than his brutal old Squire Western of a father. His sister Wilhelmina is perhaps an exception. We say perhaps, for we do not know how much the heroic part he was called on to play had to do with the matter, and whether sisterly pride did not pass even with herself for sisterly affection. Moreover she was far from him; and Mr. Carlyle waves aside, in his

generous fashion, some rather keen comments of hers on her brother's character when she visited Berlin after he had become king. Indeed, he is apt to deal rather contemptuously with all adverse criticism of his hero. We sympathise with his impulse in this respect, agreeing heartily as we do in Chaucer's scorn of those who "*gladlie* demen to the baser end" in such matters. But we are not quite sure if this be a safe method with the historian. He must doubtless be the friend of his hero if he would understand him, but he must be more the friend of truth if he would understand history. Mr. Carlyle's passion for truth is intense, as befits his temper, but it is that of a lover for his mistress. He would have her all to himself, and has a lover's conviction that no one is able, or even fit, to appreciate her but himself. He does well to despise the tittle-tattle of vulgar minds, but surely should not ignore *all* testimony on the other side. For ourselves, we think it not unimportant that Goethe's friend Knebel, a man not incapable of admiration, and who had served a dozen years or so as an officer of Friedrich's guard, should have bluntly called him "the tyrant."

Mr. Carlyle's history traces the family of his hero down from its beginnings in the picturesque chiaro-scuro of the Middle Ages. It was an able, and, above all, a *canny* house, a Scotch version of the word *able*, which implies thrift and an eye to the main chance, the said main chance or chief end of man being altogether of this world. Friedrich, inheriting this family faculty in full measure, was driven, partly by ambition, partly by necessity, to apply it to war. He did so, with the success to be expected where a man of many expedients has the good luck to be opposed by men with few. He adds another to the many proofs that it is possible to be a great general without a spark of that divine fire which we call genius, and that good fortune in war results from the same prompt talent and unbending temper which lead to the same result in the peaceful professions. Friedrich had certainly more of the temperament of genius than Marlborough or Wellington; but not to go

beyond modern instances, he does not impress us with the massive breadth of Napoleon, nor attract us with the climbing ardour of Turenne. To compare him with Alexander or Cæsar were absurd. The kingship that was in him, and which won Mr. Carlyle to be his biographer, is that of will merely, of rapid and relentless command. For organisation he had a masterly talent; but he could not apply it to the arts of peace, both because he wanted experience and because the rash decision of the battle-field will not serve in matters which are governed by natural laws of growth. He seems, indeed, to have had a coarse, soldier's contempt for all civil distinction, altogether unworthy of a wise king, or even of a prudent one He confers the title of Hofrath on the husband of a woman with whom his General Walrave is living in what Mr. Carlyle justly calls "brutish polygamy," and this at Walrave's request, on the ground that "a general's drab ought to have a handle to her name." Mr. Carlyle murmurs in a mild parenthesis that "we rather regret this!" (Vol. iii. p. 559.) This is his usual way of treating unpleasant matters, sidling by with a deprecating shrug of the shoulders. Not that he ever wilfully suppresses anything. On the contrary, there is no greater proof of his genius than the way in which, while he seems to paint a character with all its disagreeable traits, he contrives to win our sympathy for it, nay, almost our liking. This is conspicuously true of his portrait of Friedrich's father; and that he does not succeed in making Friedrich himself attractive is a strong argument with us that the fault is in the subject and not the artist.

The book, we believe, has been comparatively unsuccessful as a literary venture. Nor do we wonder at it. It is disproportionately long, and too much made up of those descriptions of battles to read which seems even more difficult than to have won the victory itself, more disheartening than to have suffered the defeat. To an American, also, the warfare seemed Lilliputian in the presence of a conflict so much larger in its proportions and significant in its results. The interest, moreover, flags decidedly

toward the close, where the reader cannot help feeling that the author loses breath somewhat painfully under the effort of so prolonged a course. Mr. Carlyle has evidently devoted to his task a labour that may be justly called prodigious. Not only has he sifted all the German histories and memoirs, but has visited every battle-field, and describes them with an eye for country that is without rival among historians. The book is evidently an abridgment of even more abundant collections, and yet as it stands the matter overburdens the work. It is a bundle of lively episodes rather than a continuous narrative. In this respect it contrasts oddly with the concinnity of his own earlier Life of Schiller. But the episodes *are* lively, the humour and pathos spring from a profound nature, the sketches of character are masterly, the seizure of every picturesque incident infallible, and the literary judgments those of a thorough scholar and critic. There is, of course, the usual amusing objurgation of Dryasdust and his rubbish-heaps, the usual assumption of omniscience, and the usual certainty of the lively French lady of being always in the right; yet we cannot help thinking that a little of Dryasdust's plodding exactness would have saved Fouquet eleven years of the imprisonment to which Mr. Carlyle condemns him, would have referred us to St. Simon rather than to Voltaire for the character of the brothers Belle-Ile, and would have kept clear of a certain ludicrous etymology of the name Antwerp, not to mention some other trifling slips of the like nature. In conclusion, after saying, as honest critics must, that "The History of Friedrich II. called Frederick the Great" is a book to be read in with more satisfaction than to be read through, after declaring that it is open to all manner of criticism, especially in point of moral purpose and tendency, we must admit with thankfulness, that it has the one prime merit of being the work of a man who has every quality of a great poet except that supreme one of rhythm which shapes both matter and manner to harmonious proportion, and that where it is good, it is good as only genius knows how to be.

With the gift of song, Carlyle would have been the greatest of epic poets since Homer. Without it, to modulate and harmonise and bring parts into their proper relation, he is the most amorphous of humourists, the most shining avatar of whim the world has ever seen. Beginning with a hearty contempt for shams, he has come at length to believe in brute force as the only reality, and has as little sense of justice as Thackeray allowed to women. We say *brute force*, because, though the theory is that this force should be directed by the supreme intellect for the time being, yet all inferior wits are treated rather as obstacles to be contemptuously shoved aside than as ancillary forces to be conciliated through their reason. But, with all deductions, he remains the profoundest critic and the most dramatic imagination of modern times. Never was there a more striking example of that *ingenium perfervidum* long ago said to be characteristic of his countrymen. His is one of the natures, rare in these latter centuries, capable of rising to a white heat; but once fairly kindled, he is like a three-decker on fire, and his shotted guns go off, as the glow reaches them, alike dangerous to friend or foe. Though he seems more and more to confound material with moral success, yet there is always something wholesome in his unswerving loyalty to reality, as he understands it. History, in the true sense, he does not and cannot write, for he looks on mankind as a herd without volition, and without moral force; but such vivid pictures of events, such living conceptions of character, we find nowhere else in prose. The figures of most historians seem like dolls stuffed with bran, whose whole substance runs out through any hole that criticism may tear in them; but Carlyle's are so real in comparison, that, if you prick them, they bleed. He seems a little wearied, here and there, in his Friedrich, with the multiplicity of detail, and does his filling-in rather shabbily; but he still remains in his own way, like his hero, the Only, and such episodes as that of Voltaire would make the fortune of any other writer. Though not the safest of guides in politics or practical philosophy, his value as an inspirer and

awakener cannot be over-estimated. It is a power which belongs only to the highest order of minds, for it is none but a divine fire that can so kindle and irradiate. The debt due him from those who listened to the teachings of his prime for revealing to them what sublime reserves of power even the humblest may find in manliness, sincerity, and self-reliance, can be paid with nothing short of reverential gratitude. As a purifier of the sources whence our intellectual inspiration is drawn, his influence has been second only to that of Wordsworth, if even to his.

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## *SWINBURNE'S TRAGEDIES.*

Are we really, then, to believe the newspapers for once, and to doff our critical nightcaps, in which we have comfortably overslept many similar rumours and false alarms, to welcome the advent of a new poet? New poets, to our thinking, are not very common, and the soft columns of the press often make dangerous concessions, for which the marble ones of Horace's day were too stony-hearted. Indeed, we have some well-grounded doubts whether England is precisely the country from which we have a right to expect that most precious of gifts just now. There is hardly enough fervour of political life there at present to ripen anything but the fruits of the literary forcing-house, so fair outwardly and so flavourless compared with those which grow in the hardier open air of a vigorous popular sentiment. Mere wealth of natural endowment is not enough; there must be also the co-operation of the time, of the public genius roused to a consciousness of itself by the necessity of asserting or defending the vital principle on which that consciousness rests, in order that a poet may rise to the highest level of his vocation. The great names of the last generation—Scott, Wordsworth, Byron—represent moods of national thought and feeling, and are therefore more or less truly British poets; just as Goethe, in whose capacious nature, open to every influence of earth

and sky, the spiritual fermentation of the eighteenth century settled and clarified, is a European one. A sceptic might say, we think, with some justice, that poetry in England was passing now, if it have not already passed, into one of those periods of mere art without any intense convictions to back it, which lead inevitably, and by no long gradation, to the mannered and artificial. Browning, by far the richest nature of the time, becomes more difficult, draws nearer to the all-for-point fashion of the *concettisti*, with every poem he writes; the dainty trick of Tennyson cloys when caught by a whole generation of versifiers, as the *style* of a great poet never can be; and we have a foreboding that Clough, imperfect as he was in many respects, and dying before he had subdued his sensitive temperament to the sterner requirements of his art, will be thought a hundred years hence to have been the truest expression in verse of the moral and intellectual tendencies, the doubt and struggle towards settled convictions, of the period in which he lived. To make beautiful conceptions immortal by exquisiteness of phrase, is to be a poet, no doubt; but to be a new poet is to feel and to utter that immanent life of things without which the utmost perfection of mere form is at best only wax or marble. He who can do both is the great poet.

Over "Chastelard, a Tragedy," we need not spend much time. It is at best but the school exercise of a young poet learning to write, and who reproduces in his copy-book, more or less travestied, the copy that has been set for him at the page's head by the authors he most admires. Grace and even force of expression are not wanting, but there is the obscurity which springs from want of definite intention; the characters are vaguely outlined from memory, not drawn firmly from the living and the nude in actual experience of life; the working of passion is an *a priori* abstraction from a scheme in the author's mind; and there is no thought, but only a vehement grasping after thought. The hand is the hand of Swinburne, but the voice is the voice of Browning. With here and there a pure strain of

sentiment, a genuine touch of nature, the effect of the whole is unpleasant with the faults of the worst school of modern poetry—the physically intense school, as we should be inclined to call it, of which Mrs. Browning's "Aurora Leigh" is the worst example, whose muse is a *fast* young woman with the lavish ornament and somewhat overpowering perfume of the *demi-monde*, and which pushes expression to the last gasp of sensuous exhaustion. They forget that convulsion is not energy, and that words, to hold fire, must first catch it from vehement heat of thought, while no artificial fervours of phrase can make the charm work backward to kindle the mind of writer or reader. An overmastering passion no longer entangles the spiritual being of its victim in the burning toils of a retribution fore-doomed in its own nature, purifying us with the terror and pity of a soul in its extremity, as the great masters were wont to set it before us; no, it must be fleshly, corporeal, must "bite with small white teeth" and draw blood, to satisfy the craving of our modern inquisitors, who torture language instead of wooing it to confess the secret of its witchcraft. That books written on this theory should be popular, is one of the worst signs of the times; that they should be praised by the censors of literature shows how seldom criticism goes back to first principles, or is even aware of them—how utterly it has forgotten its most earnest function of demolishing the high places where the unclean rites of Baal and Ashtaroth usurp on the worship of the one only True and Pure.

"Atalanta in Calydon" is in every respect better than its forerunner. It is a true poem, and seldom breaks from the maidenly reserve which should characterise the higher forms of poetry, even in the keenest energy of expression. If the blank verse be a little mannered and stiff, reminding one of Landor in his attempts to reproduce the antique, the lyrical parts are lyrical in the highest sense, graceful, flowing, and generally simple in sentiment and phrase. There are some touches of nature in the mother's memories of Althea, so sweetly pathetic that they go as right to the

heart as they came from it, and are neither Greek nor English, but broadly human. And yet, when we had read the book through, we felt as if we were leaving a world of shadows, inhabited by less substantial things than that nether realm of Homer where the very eidolon of Achilles is still real to us in its longings and regrets. These are not characters, but outlines after the Elgin marbles in the thinnest manner of Flaxman. There is not so much blood in the whole of them as would warm the little finger of one of Shakespeare's living and breathing conceptions. We could not help thinking of those exquisite verses addressed by Schiller to Goethe, in which, while he expresses a half-truth so eloquently as almost to make it seem a whole one, he touches unconsciously the weak point of their common striving after a Grecian instead of a purely human ideal.

> "Doch leicht gezimmert nur ist Thespis Wagen,
> Und er ist gleich dem acheront'schen Kahn;
> Nur Schatten und Idole kann er tragen,
> Und drängt das rohe Leben sich heran,
> So droht das leichte Fahrzeug umzuschlagen
> Das nur die flucht'gen Geister fassen kann;
> Der Schein soll nie die Wirklichkeit erreichen
> Und siegt Natur, so muss die Kunst entweichen."

The actors in the drama are unreal and shadowy, the motives which actuate them alien to our modern modes of thought and conceptions of character. To a Greek, the element of Fate, with which his imagination was familiar, while it heightened the terror of the catastrophe, would have supplied the place of that impulse in mere human nature which our habit of mind demands for its satisfaction. The fulfilment of an oracle, the anger of a deity, the arbitrary doom of some blind and purposeless power superior to man, the avenging of blood to appease an injured ghost, any one of these might make that seem simply natural to a contemporary of Sophocles which is intelligible to us only by study and reflection. It is not a little curious that Shakespeare should have made the last of the motives we have just mentioned, and which was conclusive for

Orestes, insufficient for Hamlet, who so perfectly typifies the introversion and complexity of modern thought as compared with ancient, in dealing with the problems of life and action. It was not perhaps without intention (for who may venture to assume a want of intention in the world's highest poetic genius at its full maturity?) that Shakespeare brings in his hero fresh from the University of Wittenberg, where Luther, who entailed upon us the responsibility of private judgment, had been Professor. The dramatic motive in the "Electra" and "Hamlet" is essentially the same, but what a difference between the straightforward bloody-mindedness of Orestes and the metaphysical punctiliousness of the Dane! Yet each was natural in his several way, and each would have been unintelligible to the audience for which the other was intended. That Fate which the Greeks made to operate from without, we recognise at work within in some vice of character or hereditary predisposition. Hawthorne, the most profoundly ideal genius of these latter days, was continually returning, more or less directly, to this theme; and his "Marble Faun," whether consciously or not, illustrates that invasion of the æsthetic by the moral which has confused art by dividing its allegiance, and dethroned the old dynasty without as yet firmly establishing the new in an acknowledged legitimacy.

"Atalanta in Calydon," shows that poverty of thought and profusion of imagery which are at once the defect and the compensation of all youthful poetry, even of Shakespeare's. It seems a paradox to say that there can be too much poetry in a poem, and yet this is a fault with which all poets begin, and which some never get over. But "Atalanta" is hopefully distinguished, in a rather remarkable way, from most early attempts, by a sense of form and proportion, which, if seconded by a seasonable ripening of other faculties, as we may fairly expect, gives promise of rare achievement hereafter. Mr. Swinburne's power of assimilating style, which is, perhaps, not so auspicious a symptom, strikes us as something marvellous. The argument of his poem, in its quaint archaism, would not need

the change of a word or in the order of a period to have been foisted on Sir Thomas Malory as his own composition. The choosing a theme which Æschylus had handled in one of his lost tragedies is justified by a certain Æschylean flavour in the treatment. The opening, without deserving to be called a mere imitation, recalls that of the "Agamemnon," and the chorus has often an imaginative lift in it, an ethereal charm of praise, of which it is the highest praise to say that it reminds us of him who soars over the other Greek tragedians like an eagle.

But in spite of many merits, we cannot help asking ourselves, as we close the book, whether "Atalanta" can be called a success, and if so, whether it be a success in the right direction. The poem reopens a question which in some sort touches the very life of modern literature. We do not mean to renew the old quarrel of Fontenelle's day as to the comparative merits of ancients and moderns. That is an affair of taste, which does not admit of any authoritative settlement. Our concern is about a principle which certainly demands a fuller discussion, and which is important enough to deserve it. Do we show our appreciation of the Greeks most wisely in attempting the mechanical reproduction of their forms, or by endeavouring to comprehend the thoughtful spirit of full-grown manhood in which they wrought, to kindle ourselves by the emulation of it, and to bring it to bear with all its plastic force upon our wholly new conditions of life and thought? It seems to us that the question is answered by the fact, patent in the history of all the fine arts, that every attempt at reproducing a bygone excellence by external imitation of it, or even by applying the rules which analytic criticism has formulated from the study of it, has resulted in producing the artificial, and not the artistic. That most subtile of all essences in physical organisation, which eludes chemist, anatomist, and microscopist, the life, is in æsthetics not less shy of the critic, and will not come forth in obedience to his most learned spells; for the very good reason that it cannot, because in all works of art it is the joint product of

the artist and of the time. Faust may believe he is gazing on "the face that launched a thousand ships," but Mephistopheles knows very well that it is only shadows that he has the skill to conjure. He is not merely the spirit that ever denies, but the spirit also of discontent with the present, that material in which every man shall work who will achieve realities and not their hollow semblance. The true anachronism, in our opinion, is not in Shakespeare's making Ulysses talk as Lord Bacon might, but in attempting to make him speak in a dialect of thought utterly dead to all present comprehension. Ulysses was the type of long-headedness; and the statecraft of an Ithacan cateran would have seemed as childish to the age of Elizabeth and Burleigh as it was naturally sufficing to the first hearers of Homer. Ulysses, living in Florence during the fifteenth century, might have been Macchiavelli; in France, during the seventeenth, Cardinal Richelieu; in America, during the nineteenth, Abraham Lincoln, but not Ulysses. Truth to nature can be reached ideally, never historically; it must be a study from the life, and not from the scholiasts. Theocritus lets us into the secret of his good poetry, when he makes Daphnis tell us that he preferred his rock with a view of the Siculian Sea to the kingdom of Pelops.

It is one of the marvels of the human mind, this sorcery which the fiend of technical imitation weaves about his victims, giving a phantasmal Helen to their arms, and making an image of the brain seem substance. Men still pain themselves to write Latin verses, matching their wooden bits of phrase together as children do dissected maps, and measuring the value of what they have done, not by any standard of intrinsic merit, but by the difficulty of doing it. Petrarch expected to be known to posterity by his "Africa." Gray hoped to make a Latin poem his monument. Goethe, who was classic in the only way it is now possible to be classic, in his "Hermann and Dorothea," and at least Propertian in his "Roman Idyls," wasted his time and thwarted his creative energy on the mechanical mock-antique of an unreadable "Achilleis." Landor prized

his waxen "Gebirus Rex" above all the natural fruits of his mind; and we have no doubt that, if some philosopher should succeed in accomplishing Paracelsus's problem of an artificial *homunculus*, he would dote on this misbegotten babe of his science, and think him the only genius of the family. We cannot over-estimate the value of some of the ancient classics, but a certain amount of superstition about Greek and Latin has come down to us from the revival of learning, and seems to hold in mortmain the intellects of whoever has, at some time, got a smattering of them. Men quote a platitude in either of those tongues with a relish of conviction as droll to the uninitiated as the knighthood of freemasonry. Horace Walpole's nephew, the Earl of Orford, when he was in his cups, used to have Statius read aloud to him every night for two hours by a tipsy tradesman, whose hiccupings threw in here and there a kind of cæsural pause, and found some strange mystery of sweetness in the disquantitied syllables. So powerful is this hallucination that we can conceive of *festina lente* as the favourite maxim of a Mississippi steamboat captain, and ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ cited as conclusive by a gentleman for whom the bottle before him reversed the wonder of the stereoscope, and substituted the Gascon *v* for the *b* in binocular.

Something of this singular superstition has infected the minds of those who confound the laws of conventional limitation which governed the practice of Greek authors in dramatic composition—laws adapted to the habits and traditions and preconceptions of their audience—with that sense of ideal form which made the Greeks masters in art to all succeeding generations. Aristophanes is beyond question the highest type of pure comedy, etherealising his humour by the infusion, or intensifying it by the contrast of poetry, and deodorising the personality of his sarcasm by a sprinkle from the clearest springs of fancy. His satire, aimed as it was at typical characteristics, is as fresh as ever; but we doubt whether an Aristophanic drama, retaining its exact form, but adapted to present

events and personages, would keep the stage as it is kept by "The Rivals," for example, immeasurably inferior as that is in every element of genius except the prime one of liveliness. Something similar in purpose to the parabasis was essayed in one, at least, of the comedies of Beaumont and Fletcher, and in our time by Tieck; but it took, of necessity, a different form of expression, and does not seem to have been successful. Indeed, the fact that what is called the legitimate drama of modern times in England, Spain, and France has been strictly a growth, and not a manufacture, that in each country it took a different form, and that, in all, the period of its culminating and beginning to decline might be measured by a generation, seems to point us toward some natural and inevitable law of human nature, and to show that, while the principles of art are immutable, their application must accommodate itself to the material supplied them by the time and by the national character and traditions. The Spanish tragedy inclines more toward the lyrical, the French toward the epical, the English toward the historical, in the representation of real life; the Spanish and English agree in the Teutonic peculiarity of admitting the humorous offset of the clown, though in the one case he parodies the leading motive of the drama, and represents the self-consciousness of the dramatist, while in the other he heightens the tragic effect by contrast (as in the grave-digging scene of "Hamlet"), and suggests that stolid but wholesome indifference of the general life—of what, for want of a better term, we call Nature—to the sin and suffering, the weakness and misfortunes of the individual man. All these nations had the same ancient examples before them, had the same reverence for antiquity, yet they involuntarily deviated, more or less happily, into originality, success, and the freedom of a living creativeness. The higher kinds of literature, the only kinds that live on because they had life at the start, are not, then, it should seem, the fabric of scholarship, of criticism, diligently studying and as diligently copying the best models, but are much rather born of some genetic

principle in the character of the people and the age which produce them. One drop of ruddy human blood puts more life into the veins of a poem than all the delusive *aurum potabile* that can be distilled out of the choicest library.

The opera is the closest approach we have to the ancient drama in the essentials of structure and presentation; and could we have a *libretto* founded on a national legend and written by one man of genius, to be filled out and accompanied by the music of another, we might hope for something of the same effect upon the stage. But themes of universal familiarity and interest are rare—"Don Giovanni" and "Faust," perhaps, most nearly, though not entirely, fulfilling the required conditions — and men of genius rarer. The oratorio seeks to evade the difficulty by choosing Scriptural subjects, and it may certainly be questioned whether the day of popular mythology, in the sense of which it subserves the purposes of epic or dramatic poetry, be not gone by for ever. Longfellow is driven to take refuge among the red men, and Tennyson in the Cambro-Breton cyclus of Arthur; but it is impossible that such themes should come so intimately home to us as the semi-fabulous stories of their own ancestors did to the Greeks. The most successful attempt at reproducing the Greek tragedy, both in theme and treatment, is the "Samson Agonistes," as it is also the most masterly piece of English versification. Goethe admits that it alone, among modern works, has caught life from the breath of the antique spirit. But he failed to see, or at least to give, the reason of it; probably failed to see it, or he would never have attempted the "Iphigenia." Milton not only subjected himself to the structural requirements of the Attic tragedy, but with the true poetic instinct availed himself of the striking advantage it had in the choice of a subject. No popular tradition lay near enough to him for his purpose; none united in itself the essential requisites of human interest and universal belief. He accordingly chose a Jewish mythus, very near to his own heart as a blind prisoner, betrayed by his wife, among the Philistines

of the Restoration, and familiar to the earliest associations of his hearers. This subject, and this alone, met all the demands both of living poetic production and of antique form—the action grandly simple, the personages few, the protagonist at once a victim of Divine judgment and an executor of Divine retribution, an intense personal sympathy in the poet himself, and no strangeness to the habitual prepossessions of those he addressed to be overcome before he could touch their hearts or be sure of aid from their imaginations. To compose such a drama on such a theme was to *be* Greek, and not to counterfeit it; for Samson was to Milton traditionally just what Herakles was to Sophocles, and personally far more. The "Agonistes" is still fresh and strong as morning, but where are "Caractacus" and "Elfrida?" Nay, where is the far better work of a far abler man — where is "Merope?" If the frame of mind which performs a deliberate experiment were the same as that which produces poetry vitalised through and through by the conspiring ardours of every nobler passion and power of the soul, then "Merope" might have had some little space of life. But without colour, without harmonious rhythm of movement, with less passion than survived in an average Grecian ghost, and all this from the very theory of her creation, she has gone back, a shadow, to join her shadowy Italian and French namesakes in that limbo of things that would be and cannot be. Mr. Arnold but retraces, in his Preface to "Merope," the arguments of Mason in the letters prefixed to his classical experiments. What finds defenders, but not readers, may be correct, classic, right in principle, but it is not poetry of that absolute kind which may and does help men, but needs no help of theirs; and such surely we have a right to demand in tragedy, if nowhere else. We should not speak so unreservedly if we did not set a high value on Mr. Arnold and his poetic gift. But "Merope" has that one fault against which the very gods, we are told, strive in vain. It is dull, and the seed of this dulness lay in the system on which it was written.

Pseudo-classicism takes two forms. Sometimes, as Mr. Landor has done, it attempts truth of detail to ancient scenery and manners, which may be attained either by hard reading and good memory, or at a cheaper rate from such authors as Becker. The "Moretum," once attributed to Virgil, and the idyl of Theocritus lately chosen as a text by Mr. Arnold, are interesting, because they describe real things; but the mock-antique, if not true, is nothing; and how true such poems are likely to be we can judge by "Punch's" success at Yankeeisms, by all England's accurate appreciation of the manners and minds of a contemporary people one with herself in language, laws, religion, and literature. The eye is the only note-book of the true poet; but a patchwork of second-hand memories is a laborious futility, hard to write and harder to read, with about as much nature in it as a dialogue of the Deipnosophists. Alexander's bushel of peas was a criticism worthy of Aristotle's pupil. We should reward such writing with the gift of a classical dictionary. In this idyllic kind of poetry also we have a classic, because Goldsmith went to nature for his "Deserted Village," and borrowed of tradition nothing but the poetic diction in which he described it. This is the only method by which a poet may surely reckon on ever becoming an ancient himself. When we heard it said once that a certain poem might have been written by Simonides, we could not help thinking that, if it were so, then it was precisely what Simonides could never have written, since he looked at the world through his own eyes, not through those of Linus or Hesiod, and thought his own thoughts, not theirs, or we should never have had him to imitate.

Objections of the same nature, but even stronger, lie against a servile copying of the form and style of the Greek tragic drama, and yet more against the selection of a Greek theme. As we said before, the life we lead, and the views we take of it, are more complex than those of men who lived five centuries before Christ. They may be better or worse, but, at any rate, they are different, and irremediably

so. The idea and the form in which it naturally embodies itself, mutually sustaining and invigorating each other, cannot be divided without endangering the lives of both. For in all real poetry the form is not a garment, but a body. Our very passion has become metaphysical, and speculates upon itself. Their simple and downright way of thinking loses all its savour when we assume it to ourselves by an effort of thought. Human nature, it is true, remains always the same, but the displays of it change; the habits which are a second nature modify it inwardly as well as outwardly, and what moves it to passionate action in one age may leave it indifferent in the next. Between us and the Greeks lies the grave of their murdered paganism, making our minds and theirs irreconcilable. Christianity as steadily intensifies the self-consciousness of man as the religion of the Greeks must have turned their thoughts away from themselves to the events of this life and the phenomena of nature. We cannot even conceive of their conception of Phoibos with any plausible assurance of coming near the truth. To take lesser matters, since the invention of printing and the cheapening of books have made the thought of all ages and nations the common property of educated men, we cannot so dis-saturate our minds of it as to be keenly thrilled in the modern imitation with those commonplaces of proverbial lore in which the chorus and secondary characters are apt to indulge, though in the original they may interest us as being natural and characteristic. In the German-silver of the modern we get something of this kind, which does not please us the more by being cut up into single lines that recall the outward semblance of some pages in Sophocles. We find it cheaper to make a specimen than to borrow one.

"CHORUS. Foolish who bites off nose, his face to spite.
OUTIS. Who fears his fate, him Fate shall one day spurn.
CHORUS. The gods themselves are pliable to Fate.
OUTIS. The strong self-ruler dreads no other sway.
CHORUS. Sometimes the shortest way goes most about.
OUTIS. Why fetch a compass, having stars within?
CHORUS. A shepherd once, I know that stars may set.

> Outis. That thou led'st sheep fits not for leading men.
> Chorus. To sleep-sealed eyes the wolf-dog barks in vain."

We protest that we have read something very like this, we will not say where, and we might call it the battledore and shuttlecock style of dialogue, except that the players do not seem to have any manifest relation to each other, but each is intent on keeping his own bit of feathered cork continually in the air.

The first sincerely popular yearning toward antiquity, the first germ of Schiller's "Götter Griechenland's," is to be found in the old poem of Tanhäuser, very nearly coincident with the beginnings of the Reformation. And if we might allegorise it, we should say that it typified precisely that longing after Venus, under her other name of Charis, which represents the relation in which modern should stand to ancient art. It is the grace of the Greeks, their sense of proportion, their distaste for the exaggerated, their exquisite propriety of phrase, which steadies imagination without cramping it—it is these that we should endeavour to assimilate without the loss of our own individuality. We should quicken our sense of form by intelligent sympathy with theirs, and not stiffen it into formalism by a servile surrender of what is genuine in us to what *was* genuine in them. "A pure form," says Schiller, "helps and sustains, an impure one hinders and shatters." But we should remember that the spirit of the age must enter as a modifying principle, not only into ideas, but into the best manner of their expression. The old bottles will not always serve for the new wine. A principle of life is the first requirement of all art, and it can only be communicated by the touch of the time and a simple faith in it; all else is circumstantial and secondary. The Greek tragedy passed through the three natural stages of poetry—the imaginative in Æschylus, the thoughtfully artistic in Sophocles, the sentimental in Euripides—and then died. If people could only learn the general applicability to periods and schools of what young Mozart says of Gellert, that "he had written no poetry *since* his death!" No effort to raise a defunct

past has ever led to anything but just enough galvanic twitching of the limbs to remind us unpleasantly of life. The romantic movement of the school of German poets which succeeded Goethe and Schiller ended in extravagant unreality, and Goethe himself, with his unerring common-sense, has given us, in the second part of "Faust," the result of his own and Schiller's common striving after a Grecian ideal. Euphorion, the child of Faust and Helen, falls dead at their feet; and Helen herself soon follows him to the shades, leaving only her mantle in the hands of her lover. This, he is told, shall lift him above the earth. We fancy we can interpret the symbol. Whether we can or not, it is certainly suggestive of thought that the only immortal production of the greatest of recent poets was conceived and carried out in that Gothic spirit and form from which he was all his life struggling to break loose.

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## *CHAUCER.**

WILL it *do* to say anything more about Chaucer? Can anyone hope to say anything, not new, but even fresh, on a topic so well worn? It may well be doubted; and yet one is always the better for a walk in the morning air—a medicine which may be taken over and over again without any sense of sameness, or any failure of its invigorating quality. There is a pervading wholesomeness in the writings of this man—a vernal property that soothes and

* *Publications of the Chaucer Society.* London. 1869-70.

*Etude sur G. Chaucer considéré comme imitateur des Trouvères.* Par E. G. SANDRAS, Agrégé de l'Université. Paris: Auguste Dusand. 1859. 8vo. pp. 298.

*Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury-Geschichten, übersetzt in den Versmassen der Urschrift, und durch Einleitung und Anmerkungen erläutert.* Von WILHELM HERTZBERG. Hildburghausen. 1866. 12mo. pp. 674.

*Chaucer in seinen Beziehungen zur italienischen Literatur. Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doctorwürde.* Von ALFONS KISSNER. Bonn. 1867. 8vo. pp. 81.

refreshes in a way of which no other has ever found the secret. I repeat to myself a thousand times—

> "Whan that Aprilë with his showrës sotë
> The droughte of March hath percëd to the rotë,
> And bathëd every veine in swich licour
> Of which vertue engendered is the flour,—
> When Zephyrus eek with his swetë breth
> Enspirëd hath in every holt and heth
> The tender croppës, and the yongë sonne
> Hath in the ram his halfë cors yronne,
> And smalë foulës maken melodië,"—

and still at the thousandth time a breath of uncontaminate springtide seems to lift the hair upon my forehead. If here be not the *largior ether*, the serene and motionless atmosphere of classical antiquity, we find at least the *seclusum nemus*, the *domos placidas*, and the *oubliance*, as Froissart so sweetly calls it, that persuade us we are in an Elysium none the less sweet that it appeals to our more purely human, one might almost say domestic, sympathies. We may say of Chaucer's muse, as Overbury of his milkmaid, "her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of *June* like a new-made haycock." The most hardened *roué* of literature can scarce confront these simple and winning graces without feeling somewhat of the unworn sentiment of his youth revive in him. Modern imaginative literature has become so self-conscious, and therefore so melancholy, that Art, which should be "the world's sweet inn," whither we repair for refreshment and repose, has become rather a watering-place, where one's own private touch of the liver-complaint is exasperated by the affluence of other sufferers whose talk is a narrative of morbid symptoms. Poets have forgotten that the first lesson of literature, no less than of life, is the learning how to burn your own smoke; that the way to be original is to be healthy; that the fresh colour, so delightful in all good writing, is won by escaping from the fixed air of self into the brisk atmosphere of universal sentiments; and that to make the common marvellous, as if it were a revelation, is the test

of genius. It is good to retreat now and then beyond earshot of the introspective confidences of modern literature, and to lose ourselves in the gracious worldiness of Chaucer. Here was a healthy and hearty man, so genuine that he need not ask whether he was genuine or no, so sincere as quite to forget his own sincerity, so truly pious that he could be happy in the best world that God chose to make, so humane that he loved even the foibles of his kind. Here was a truly epic poet, without knowing it, who did not waste time in considering whether his age were good or bad, but quietly taking it for granted as the best that ever was or ever could be for *him*, has left us such a picture of contemporary life as no man ever painted. "A perpetual fountain of good-sense," Dryden calls him; yes, and of good-humour, too, and wholesome thought. He was one of those rare authors whom, if we had met him under a porch in a shower, we should have preferred to the rain. He could be happy with a crust and spring-water, and could see the shadow of his benign face in a flagon of Gascon wine without fancying Death sitting opposite to cry *Supernaculum!* when he had drained it. He could look to God without abjectness, and on man without contempt. The pupil of manifold experience—scholar, courtier, soldier, ambassador, who had known poverty as a housemate and been the companion of princes—his was one of those happy temperaments that could equally enjoy both halves of culture, the world of books and the world of men.

> "Unto this day it doth mine hertë boote,
> That I have had my world as in my time!"

The portrait of Chaucer, which we owe to the loving regret of his disciple Occleve, confirms the judgment of him which we make for his works. It is, I think, more engaging than that of any other poet. The downcast eyes, half sly, half meditative, the sensuous mouth, the broad brow, drooping with weight of thought, and yet with an inexpugnable youth shining out of it as from the morning forehead of a boy, are all noticeable, and not less so their harmony of

placid tenderness. We are struck, too, with the smoothness of the face as of one who thought easily whose phrase flowed naturally, and who had never puckered his brow over an unmanageable verse.

Nothing has been added to our knowledge of Chaucer's life since Sir Harris Nicolas, with the help of original records, weeded away the fictions by which the few facts were choked and overshadowed. We might be sorry that no confirmation has been found for the story, fathered on a certain phantasmal Mr. Buckley, that Chaucer was "fined two shillings for beating a Franciscan friar in Fleet Street," if it were only for the alliteration; but we refuse to give up the meeting with Petrarch. All the probabilities are in its favour. That Chaucer, being at Milan, should not have found occasion to ride across so far as Padua, for the sake of seeing the most famous literary man of the day, is incredible. If Froissart could journey on horseback through Scotland and Wales, surely Chaucer, whose curiosity was as lively as his, might have ventured what would have been a mere pleasure-trip in comparsion. I cannot easily bring myself to believe that he is not giving some touches of his own character in that of the Clerk of Oxford :—

> "For him was liefer have at his bed's head
> A twenty bookës clothed in black and red
> Of Aristotle and his philosophië
> Than robës rich, or fiddle or psaltrië:
> But although that he were a philosòpher,
> Yet had he but a little gold in coffer;
> Of study took he mostë care and heed;
> Not one word spake he morë than was need:
> All that he spake it was of high prudèncë,
> And short and quick, and full of great sentencë;
> Sounding in moral virtue was his speech,
> And gladly would he learn and gladly teach."

That, himself as plump as Horace, he should have described the Clerk as being lean, will be no objection to those who remember how carefully Chaucer effaces his own personality in his great poem. Our chief debt to Sir Harris

Nicolas is for having disproved the story that Chaucer, imprisoned for complicity in the insurrection of John of Northampton, had set himself free by betraying his accomplices. That a poet, one of whose leading qualities is his good sense and moderation, and who should seem to have practised his own rule, to

> "Fly from the press and dwell with soothfastness;
> Suffice thee thy good though it be small."

should have been concerned in any such political excesses, was improbable enough; but that he should add to this the baseness of broken faith was incredible except to such as in a doubtful story

> "Demen gladly to the badder end."

Sir Harris Nicolas has proved by the records that the fabric is baseless, and we may now read the poet's fine verse,

> "Truth is the highest thing a man may keep,"

without a pang. We are thankful that Chaucer's shoulders are finally discharged of that weary load, "The Testament of Love."* The later biographers seem inclined to make Chaucer a younger man at his death in 1400 than has hitherto been supposed. Herr Hertzberg even puts his birth so late as 1340. But, till more conclusive evidence is produced, we shall adhere to the received dates as on the whole more consonant with the probabilities of the case. The monument is clearly right as to the year of his death, and the chances are at least even that both this and the date of birth were copied from an older inscription. The only counter-argument that has much force is the manifestly unfinished condition of the "Canterbury Tales." That a

* Tyrwhitt doubted the authenticity of "The Flower and the Leaf" and "The Cuckoo and the Nightingale." To these Mr. Bradshaw (and there can be no higher authority) would add "The Court of Love," "The Dream," "The Praise of Woman," and "The Romaunt of the Rose," and several of the shorter poems. To these doubtful productions there is strong ground, both moral and æsthetic, for adding "The Parson's Tale."

man of seventy odd could have put such a spirit of youth into those matchless prologues will not, however, surprise those who remember Dryden's second spring-time. It is plain that the notion of giving unity to a number of disconnected stories by the device which Chaucer adopted was an afterthought. These stories had been written, and some of them even published, at periods far asunder, and without any reference to connection among themselves. The prologues, and those parts which internal evidence justifies us in taking them to have been written after the thread of plan to string them on was conceived, are in every way more mature—in knowledge of the world, in easy mastery of verse and language, and in the overpoise of sentiment by judgment. They may with as much probability be referred to a green old age as to the middle-life of a man who, upon any theory of the dates, was certainly slow in ripening.

The formation of a Chaucer Society, now four centuries and a-half after the poet's death, gives suitable occasion for taking a new observation of him, as of a fixed star, not only in our own, but in the European literary heavens, "whose worth's unknown although his height be taken." The admirable work now doing by this Society, whose establishment was mainly due to the pious zeal of Mr. Furnivall, deserves recognition from all who know how to value the too rare union of accurate scholarship with minute exactness in reproducing the text. The six-text edition of the "Canterbury Tales," giving what is practically equivalent to six manuscript copies, is particularly deserving of gratitude from this side the water, as it for the first time affords to Americans the opportunity of independent critical study and comparison. This beautiful work is fittingly inscribed to our countryman, Professor Child, of Harvard, a lover of Chaucer, "so proved by his wordës and his werke," who has done more for the great poet's memory than any man since Tyrwhitt. We earnestly hope that the Society may find enough support to print all the remaining manuscript

texts of importance, for there can hardly be any one of them that may not help us to a valuable hint. The works of M. Sandras and Herr Hertzberg show that this is a matter of interest not merely or even primarily to English scholars. The introduction to the latter is one of the best essays on Chaucer yet written, while the former, which is an investigation of the French and Italian sources of the poet, supplies us with much that is new and worth having as respects the training of the poet, and the obstacles of fashion and taste through which he had to force his way before he could find free play for his native genius or even so much as arrive at a consciousness thereof. M. Sandras is in every way a worthy pupil of the accomplished M. Victor Leclerc, and, though he lays perhaps a little too much stress on the indebtedness of Chaucer in particulars, shows a singularly intelligent and clear-sighted eye for the general grounds of his claim to greatness and originality. It is these grounds which I propose chiefly to examine here.

The first question we put to any poet, nay, to any so-called national literature, is that which Farinata addressed to Dante—*Chi fur li maggior tui?* Here is no question of plagiarism, for poems are not made of words, and thoughts, and images, but of that something in the poet himself which can compel them to obey him and move to the rhythm of his nature. Thus it is that the new poet, however late he come, can never be forestalled, and the shipbuilder who built the pinnace of Columbus has as much claim to the discovery of America as he who suggests a thought by which some other man opens new worlds to us has to a share in that achievement by him unconceived and inconceivable. Chaucer undoubtedly began as an imitator, perhaps as mere translator, serving the needful apprenticeship in the use of his tools. Children learn to speak by watching the lips and catching the words of those who know how already, and poets learn in the same way from their elders. They import their raw material from any and everywhere, and the question at last comes down to this—

whether an author have original force enough to assimilate all he has acquired, or that be so over-mastering as to assimilate *him*. If the poet turn out the stronger, we allow him to help himself from other people with wonderful equanimity. Should a man discover the art of transmuting metals, and present us with a lamp of gold as large as an ostrich-egg, would it be in human nature to inquire too nicely whether he had stolen the lead?

Nothing is more certain than that great poets are not sudden prodigies, but slow results. As an oak profits by the foregone lives of immemorial vegetable races that have worked-over the juices of earth and air into organic life out of whose dissolution a soil might gather fit to maintain that nobler birth of nature, so we may be sure that the genius of every remembered poet drew the forces that built it up out of the decay of a long succession of forgotten ones. Nay, in proportion as the genius is vigorous and original will its indebtedness be greater, will its roots strike deeper into the past and grope in remoter fields for the virtue that must sustain it. Indeed, if the works of the great poets teach anything, it is to hold mere invention somewhat cheap. It is not the finding of a thing, but the making something out of it after it is found, that is of consequence. Accordingly, Chaucer, like Shakespeare, invented almost nothing. Wherever he found anything directed to Geoffrey Chaucer, he took it and made the most of it. It was not the subject treated, but himself, that was the new thing. *Cela m'appartient de droit*, Molière is reported to have said when accused of plagiarism. Chaucer pays that "usurious interest which genius," as Coleridge says, "always pays in borrowing." The characteristic touch is his own. In the famous passage about the caged bird, copied from the "Romaunt of the Rose," the "gon eten wormes" was added by him. We must let him, if he will, eat the heart out of the literature that had preceded him, as we sacrifice the mulberry-leaves to the silkworm, because he knows how to convert them into something richer and more lasting. The question of originality is not one of form, but of

substance; not of cleverness, but of imaginative power. Given your material, in other words the life in which you live, how much can you see in it? For on that depends how much you can make of it. Is it merely an arrangement of man's contrivance, a patchwork of expediencies for temporary comfort and convenience, good enough if it last your time; or is it so much of the surface of that ever-flowing deity which we call Time, wherein we catch such fleeting reflection as is possible for us, of our relation to predurable things? This is what makes the difference between Æschylus and Euripides, between Shakespeare and Fletcher, between Goethe and Heine, between literature and rhetoric. Something of this depth of insight, if not in the fullest, yet in no inconsiderable measure, characterises Chaucer. We must not let his playfulness, his delight in the world as mere spectacle, mislead us into thinking that he was incapable of serious purpose or insensible to the deeper meanings of life.

There are four principal sources from which Chaucer may be presumed to have drawn for poetical suggestion or literary culture—the Latins, the Troubadours, the Trouvères, and the Italians. It is only the two latter who can fairly claim any immediate influence in the direction of his thought or the formation of his style. The only Latin poet who can be supposed to have influenced the spirit of mediæval literature is Ovid. In his sentimentality, his love of the marvellous and the picturesque, he is its natural precursor. The analogy between his Fasti and the versified legends of saints is more than a fanciful one. He was certainly popular with the poets of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Virgil had well-nigh become mythical. The chief merit of the Provençal poets is in having been the first to demonstrate that it was possible to write with elegance in a modern dialect, and their interest for us is mainly as forerunners, as indications of tendency. Their literature is prophecy, not fulfilment. Its formal sentiment culminated in Laura, its ideal aspiration in Beatrice. Shakespeare's hundred and sixth sonnet, if, for the

imaginary mistress to whom it was addressed, we substitute the muse of a truer conception and more perfected utterance, represents exactly the feeling with which we read Provençal poetry :—

> "When in the chronicle of wasted Time
> I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
> And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
> In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,
> . . . . . .
> I see their antique pen would have expressed
> Even such a beauty as you master now ;
> So all their praises are but prophecies
> Of this our time, all you prefiguring,
> And, for they looked but with divining eyes,
> They had not skill enough your worth to sing."

It is astonishing how little of the real life of the time we learn from the Troubadours, except by way of inference and deduction. Their poetry is purely lyric in its most narrow sense, that is, the expression of personal and momentary moods. To the fancy of critics who take their cue from tradition, Provence is a morning sky of early summer, out of which innumerable larks rain a faint melody (the sweeter because rather half divined than heard too distinctly) over an earth where the dew never dries and the flowers never fade. But when we open Raynouard it is like opening the door of an aviary. We are deafened and confused by a hundred minstrels singing the same song at once, and more than suspect that the flowers they welcome are made of French cambric, spangled with dewdrops of prevaricating glass. Bernard de Ventadour and Bertrand de Born are well-nigh the only ones among them in whom we find an original type. Yet the Troubadours undoubtedly led the way to refinement of conception and perfection of form. They were the conduit through which the failing stream of Roman literary tradition flowed into the new channel which mediæval culture was slowly shaping for itself. Without them we could not understand Petrarca, who carried the manufacture of artificial bloom and fictitious dewdrop to a

point of excellence where artifice, if ever, may claim the praise of art. Without them we could not understand Dante, in whom their sentiment for woman was idealised by a passionate intellect and a profound nature, till Beatrice becomes a half human, half divine abstraction, a woman still to memory and devotion, a disembodied symbol to the ecstasy of thought. The Provençal love-poetry was as abstracted from all sensuality as that of Petrarca, but it stops short of that larger and more gracious style of treatment which has secured him a place in all gentle hearts and refined imaginations for ever. In it also woman leads her servants upward, but it is along the easy slopes of conventional sentiment, and no Troubadour so much as dreamed of that loftier region, native to Dante, where *the* woman is subtilised into *das Ewig-Weibliche*, type of man's finer conscience and nobler aspiration made sensible to him only through her.

On the whole, it would be hard to find anything more tediously artificial than the Provençal literature, except the reproduction of it by the Minnesingers. The *Tedeschi lurchi* certainly *did* contrive to make something heavy as dough out of what was at least light, if not very satisfying, in the canarous dialect of Southern Gaul. But its doom was inevitably predicted in its nature and position, nay, in its very name. It was, and it continues to be, a strictly *provincial* literature, imprisoned within extremely narrow intellectual and even geographical limits. It is not race or language that can inflict this leprous isolation, but some defect of sympathy with the simpler and more universal relations of human nature. You cannot shut up Burns in a dialect bristling with archaisms, nor prevent Béranger from setting all pulses a-dance in the least rhythmic and imaginative of modern tongues. The healthy temperature of Chaucer, with its breadth of interest in all ranks and phases of social life, could have found little that was sympathetic in the evaporated sentiment and rhetorical punctilios of a school of poets which, with rare exceptions, began and ended in courtly dilettantism.

The refined formality with which the literary product of Provence is for the most part stamped, as with a trademark, was doubtless the legacy of Gallo-Roman culture, itself at best derivative and superficial. I think, indeed, that it may well be doubted whether Roman literature, always a half-hardy exotic, could ripen the seeds of living reproduction. The Roman genius was eminently practical, and far more apt for the triumphs of politics and jurisprudence than of art. Supreme elegance it could and did arrive at in Virgil, but, if I may trust my own judgment, it produced but one original poet, and that was Horace, who has ever since continued the favourite of men of the world, an apostle to the Gentiles of the mild cynicism of middle-age and an after-dinner philosophy. Though in no sense national, he was, more truly than any has ever been since, till the same combination of circumstances produced Béranger, an urbane or city poet. Rome, with her motley life, her formal religion, her easy morals, her spectacles, her luxury, her suburban country-life, was his muse. The situation was new, and found a singer who had wit enough to turn it to account. There are a half-dozen pieces of Catullus unsurpassed (unless their Greek originals should turn up) for lyric grace and fanciful tenderness. The sparrow of Lesbia still pecks the rosy lips of his mistress, immortal as the eagle of Pindar. One profound imagination, one man, who with a more prosperous subject might have been a great poet, lifted Roman literature above its ordinary level of tasteful common-sense. The invocation of Venus, as the genetic force of nature, by Lucretius, seems to me the one sunburst of purely poetic inspiration which the Latin language can show. But this very force, without which *neque fit lætum neque amabile quicquam*, was wholly wanting in those poets of the post-classic period, through whom the literary influences of the past were transmitted to the romanised provincials. The works of Ausonius interest us as those of our own Dwights and Barlows do. The "Conquest of Canaan" and the "Columbiad" were Connecticut epics no doubt, but still were better than nothing in their day.

If not literature, they were at least memories of literature, and such memories are not without effect in reproducing what they regret. The provincial writers of Latin devoted themselves with a dreary assiduity to the imitation of models which they deemed classical, but which were truly so only in the sense that they were the more decorously respectful of the dead form in proportion as the living spirit had more utterly gone out of it. It is, I suspect, to the traditions of this purely rhetorical influence, indirectly exercised, that we are to attribute the rapid passage of the new Provençal poetry from what must have been its original popular character to that highly artificial condition which precedes total extinction. It was the alienation of the written from the spoken language (always, perhaps, more or less malignly operative in giving Roman literature a cool-blooded turn as compared with Greek), which, ending at length in total divorce, rendered Latin incapable of supplying the wants of new men and new ideas. The same thing, I am strongly inclined to think, was true of the language of the Troubadours. It had become literary, and so far dead. It is true that no language is ever so far gone in consumption as to be beyond the great-poet-cure. Undoubtedly a man of genius can out of his own superabundant vitality compel life into the most decrepit vocabulary. But it is by the infusion of his own blood, as it were, and not without a certain sacrifice of power. No such rescue came for the *langue d'oc*, which, it should seem, had performed its special function in the development of modern literature, and would have perished even without the Albigensian war. The position of the Gallo-Romans of the South, both ethical and geographical, precluded them from producing anything really great or even original in literature, for that must have its root in a national life, and this they never had. After the Burgundian invasion their situation was in many respects analogous to our own after the Revolutionary War. They had been thoroughly romanised in language and culture, but the line of their historic continuity had been broken. The

Roman road, which linked them with the only past they knew, had been buried under the great barbarian land-slide. In like manner we, inheriting the language, the social usages, the literary and political traditions of Englishmen, were suddenly cut adrift from our historical anchorage. Very soon there arose a demand for a native literature, nay, it was even proposed that, as a first step toward it, we should adopt a lingo of our own to be called the Columbian or Hesperian. This, to be sure, was never accomplished, though our English cousins seem to hint sometimes that we have made very fair advances toward it; but if it could have been, our position would have been precisely that of the Provençals when they began to have a literature of their own. They had formed a language which, while it completed their orphanage from their imperial mother, continually recalled her, and kept alive their pride of lineage. Such reminiscences as they still retained of Latin culture were pedantic and rhetorical,* and it was only natural that out of those they should have elaborated a code of poetical jurisprudence with titles and subtitles applicable to every form of verse and tyrannous over every mode of sentiment. The result could not fail to be artificial and wearisome, except where some man with a truly lyrical genius could breathe life into the rigid formula and make it pliant to his more passionate feeling. The great service of the Provençals was that they kept in mind the fact that poetry was not merely an amusement, but an art, and long after their literary activity had ceased their influence had reacted beneficially upon Europe through their Italian pupils. They are interesting as showing the tendency of the Romanic races to a scientific treatment of what, if it be not spontaneous, becomes a fashion and ere long an impertinence. Fauriel has endeavoured to prove that they were the first to treat the mediæval heroic legends epically, but the evidence is strongly against him. The testimony of Dante on this

* Fauriel's *Histoire de la Gaule Méridionale*, vol. i. *passim*.

point is explicit,* and moreover, not a single romance of chivalry has come down to us in a dialect of the pure Provençal.

The Trouvères, on the other hand, are apt to have something naïve and vigorous about them, something that smacks of race and soil. Their very coarseness is almost better than the Troubadour delicacy, because it was not an affectation. The difference between the two schools is that between a culture pedantically transmitted and one which grows and gathers strength from natural causes. Indeed, it is to the North of France and to the Trouvères that we are to look for the true origins of our modern literature. I do not mean in their epical poetry, though there is something refreshing in the mere fact of their choosing native heroes and legends as the subjects of their song. It was in their *Fabliaux* and *Lais* that, dealing with the realities of the life about them, they became original and delightful in spite of themselves. Their *Chansons de Geste* are fine specimens of fighting Christianity, highly inspiring for men like Peire de Bergerac, who sings—

> "Bel m'es can aug lo resso
> Que fai l'ausbercs ab l'arso,
> Li bruit e il crit e il masan
> Que il corn e las trombas fan;" †

but who, after reading them—even the best of them, the Song of Roland—can remember much more than a cloud of

* Allegat ergo pro se lingua *Oil* quod propter sui faciliorem et delectabiliorem vulgaritatem, quicquid redactum sive inventum est ad vulgare prosaicum, suum est; videlicet biblia cum Trojanorum, Romanorumque gestibus compilata et Arturi regis ambages pulcherrimæ et quamplures aliæ historiæ ac doctrinæ. That Dante by *prosaicum* did not mean prose, but a more inartificial verse, *numeros lege solutos*, is clear. Cf. Wolf, Ueber die Lais, pp. 92 *seq.* and notes. It has not, I think, been remarked that Dante borrows his *faciliorem et delectabiliorem* from the *plus dilctable et comune* of his master Brunetto Latini.

† "My ears no sweeter music know
Than hauberk's clank with saddlebow,
The noise, the cries, the tumult blown
From trumpet and from clarion.

battle-dust, through which the paladins loom dimly gigantic, and a strong verse flashes here and there like an angry sword? What are the *Roman d'avantures*, the cycle of Arthur and his knights, but a procession of armour and plumes—mere spectacle, not vision like their Grecian antitype, the Odyssey, whose pictures of life, whether domestic or heroic, are among the abiding consolations of the mind? An element of disproportion, of grotesqueness,* earmark of the barbarian, disturbs us, even when it does not disgust, in them all. Except the *Roland*, they all want adequate motive, and even in that we may well suspect a reminiscence of the Iliad. They are not without a kind of dignity, for manliness is always noble, and there are detached scenes that are striking, perhaps all the more so from their rarity, like the combat of Oliver and Fierabras, and the leave-taking of Parise la Duchesse. But in point of art they are far below even Firdusi, whose great poem is of precisely the same romantic type. The episode of Sohrab and Rustem as much surpasses the former of the passages just alluded to in largeness and energy of treatment, in the true epical quality, as the lament of Tehmine over her son does the latter of them in refined and natural pathos. In our revolt against pseudo-classicism we must not let our admiration for the vigour and freshness which are the merit of this old poetry tempt us to forget that our direct literary inheritance comes to us from an ancestry who would never have got beyond the Age of Iron but for the models of graceful form and delicate workmanship which they found in the tombs of an earlier race.

I recall but one passage (from *Jourdain de Blaivies*) which in its simple movement of the heart can in any way be compared with Chaucer. I translate it freely, merely changing the original assonance into rhyme. Eremborc, to save the son of her leige-lord, has passed off her own child for his, only stipulating that he shall pass the night before his death with her in the prison where she is confined by

* Compare Floripar in *Fierabras* with Nausikäa, for example.

the usurper Fromond. The time is just as the dreaded dawn begins to break.

> " 'Garnier, fair son,' the noble lady said,
> 'To save thy father's life must thou be dead;
> And mine, alas, must be with sorrow spent,
> Since thou must die, albeit so innocent!
> Evening thou shalt not see that see'st the morn!
> Woe worth the hour that I beheld thee born,
> Whom nine long months within my side I bore!
> Was never babe desired so much before.
> Now summer will the pleasant days recall
> When I shall take my stand upon the wall
> And see the fair young gentlemen thy peers
> That come and go, and, as beseems their years,
> Run at the quintain, strive to pierce the shield,
> And in the tourney keep their sell or yield;
> Then must my heart be tearswoln for thy sake,
> That 'twill be marvel if it do not break.'
> At morning, when the day began to peer,
> Matins rang out from minsters far and near,
> And the clerks sang full well with voices high.
> 'God,' said the dame, 'thou glorious in the sky,
> These lingering nights were wont to tire me so!
> And this, alas, how swift it hastes to go!
> These clerks and cloistered folk, alas, in spite
> So early sing to cheat me of my night!' "

The great advantages which the *langue d'oil* had over its sister dialect of the South of France were its wider distribution, and its representing the national and unitary tendencies of the people as opposed to those of provincial isolation. But the Trouvères had also this superiority, that they gave a voice to real and not merely conventional emotions. In comparison with the Troubadours their sympathies were more human, and their expression mor popular. While the tiresome ingenuity of the latter busied itself chiefly in the filigree of wire-drawn sentiment and supersubtilised conceit, the former took their subjects from the street and the market as well as from the château. In the one case language had become a mere material for clever elaboration; in the other, as always in live literature, it was a soil from which the roots of thought and feeling unconsciously drew the colouring of vivid expression. The

writers of French, by the greater pliancy of their dialect and the simpler forms of their verse, had acquired an ease which was impossible in the more stately and sharply-angled vocabulary of the South. Their octosyllabics have not seldom a careless facility not unworthy of Swift in his best mood. They had attained the highest skill and grace in narrative, as the lays of Marie de France and the *Lai de l'Oiselet* bear witness.* Above all, they had learned how to brighten the hitherto monotonous web of story with the gayer hues of fancy.

It is no improbable surmise that the sudden and surprising development of the more strictly epical poetry in the North of France, and especially its growing partiality for historical in preference to mythical subjects, were due to the Normans. The poetry of the Danes was much of it authentic history, or what was believed to be so ; the heroes of their Sagas were real men, with wives and children, with relations public and domestic, on the common levels of life, and not mere creatures of imagination, who dwell apart like stars from the vulgar cares and interests of men. If we compare Havelok with the least idealised figures of Carlovingian or Arthurian romance, we shall have a keen sense of this difference. Manhood has taken the place of caste, and homeliness of exaggeration. Havelok says,—

> "Godwot, I will with thee gang
> For to learn some good to get;
> Swinken would I for my meat;
> It is no shame for to swinken."

This Dane, we see, is of our own make and stature, a being much nearer our kindly sympathies than his compatriot Ogier, of whom we are told,

> "Dix piès de lonc avoit le chevalier."

But however large or small share we may allow to the Danes in changing the character of French poetry and supplanting the Romance with the Fabliau, there can be little doubt either of the kind or amount of influence which

* If internal evidence may be trusted, the *Lai de l'Espine* is not hers.

the Normans must have brought with them into England. I am not going to attempt a definition of the Anglo-Saxon element in English literature, for generalisations are apt to be as dangerous as they are tempting. But as a painter may draw a cloud so that we recognise its general truth, though the boundaries of real clouds never remain the same for two minutes together, so amid the changes of feature and complexion brought about by commingling of race, there still remains a certain cast of physiognomy which points back to some one ancestor of marked and peculiar character. It is toward this type that there is always a tendency to revert, to borrow Mr. Darwin's phrase, and I think the general belief is not without some adequate grounds which in France traces this predominant type to the Kelt, and in England to the Saxon. In old and stationary communities, where tradition has a chance to take root, and where several generations are present to the mind of each inhabitant, either by personal recollection or transmitted anecdote, everybody's peculiarities, whether of strength or weakness, are explained and, as it were, justified upon some theory of hereditary bias. Such and such qualities he got from a grandfather on the spear or a great-uncle on the spindle side. This gift came in a right line from So-and-so; that failing came in by the dilution of the family blood with that of Such-a-one. In this way a certain allowance is made for every aberration from some assumed normal type, either in the way of reinforcement or defect, and that universal desire of the human mind to have everything accounted for—which makes the moon responsible for the whimsies of the weathercock—is cheaply gratified. But as mankind in the aggregate is always wiser than any single man, because its experience is derived from a larger range of observation and experience, and because the springs that feed it drain a wider region both of time and space, there is commonly some greater or smaller share of truth in all popular prejudices. The meteorologists are beginning to agree with the old women that the moon *is* an accessory before the fact in our

atmospheric fluctuations. Now, although to admit this notion of inherited good or ill to its fullest extent would be to abolish personal character, and with it all responsibility, to abdicate free-will, and to make every effort at self-direction futile, there is no inconsiderable alloy of truth in it, nevertheless. No man can look into the title-deeds of what may be called his personal estate, his faculties, his predilections, his failings—whatever, in short, sets him apart as a capital I—without something like a shock of dread to find how much of him is held in mortmain by those who, though long ago mouldered away to dust, are yet fatally alive and active in him for good or ill. What is true of individual men is true also of races, and the prevailing belief in a nation as to the origin of certain of its characteristics has something of the same basis in facts of observation as the village estimate of the traits of particular families. *Interdum vulgus rectum videt.*

We are apt, it is true, to talk rather loosely about our Anglo-Saxon ancestors, and to attribute to them in a vague way all the pith of our institutions and the motive power of our progress. For my own part, I think there is such a thing as being too Anglo-Saxon, and the warp and woof of the English national character, though undoubtedly two elements mainly predominate in it, is quite too complex for us to pick out a strand here and there, and affirm that the *body* of the fabric is of this or that. Our present concern with the Saxons is chiefly a literary one; but it leads to a study of general characteristics. What, then, so far as we can make it out, seems to be their leading mental feature? Plainly, understanding, common-sense—a faculty which never carries its possessor very high in creative literature, though it may make him great as an acting and even thinking man. Take Dr. Johnson as an instance. The Saxon, as it appears to me, has never shown any capacity for art, nay, commonly commits ugly blunders when he is tempted in that direction. He has made the best working institutions and the ugliest monuments among the children of men. He is wanting in taste, which is as much as to say that he

has no true sense of proportion. His genius is his *solidity* —an admirable foundation of national character. He is healthy, in no danger of liver-complaint, with digestive apparatus of amazing force and precision. He is the best farmer and best grazier among men, raises the biggest crops and the fattest cattle, and consumes proportionate quantities of both. He settles and sticks like a diluvial deposit on the warm, low-lying levels, physical and moral. He has a prodigious talent, to use our Yankee phrase, of *staying put.* You cannot move him; he and rich earth have a natural sympathy of cohesion. Not quarrelsome, but with indefatigable durability of fight in him, sound of stomach, and not too refined in nervous texture, he is capable of indefinitely prolonged punishment, with a singularly obtuse sense of propriety in acknowledging himself beaten. Among all races perhaps none has shown so acute a sense of the side on which its bread is buttered, and so great a repugnance for having fine phrases take the place of the butyraceous principle. They invented the words "humbug," "cant," "sham," "gag," "soft-sodder," "flapdoddle," and other disenchanting formulas, whereby the devil of falsehood and unreality gets his effectual *apage Satana!*

An imperturbable perception of the *real* relations of things is the Saxon's leading quality—no sense whatever, or at best small, of the ideal in him. He has no notion that two and two ever make five, which is the problem the poet often has to solve. Understanding, that is, equilibrium of mind, intellectual good digestion, this, with unclogged biliary ducts, makes him mentally and physically what we call a very fixed fact; but you shall not find a poet in a hundred thousand square miles—in many prosperous centuries of such. But one element of incalculable importance we have not mentioned. In this homely nature, the idea of God, and of a simple and direct relation between the All-Father and his children, is deeply-rooted. There, above all, will he have honesty and simplicity; less than anything else will he have the sacramental wafer—that beautiful emblem of our dependence on Him who giveth the daily

bread ; less than anything will he have this smeared with that Barmecide butter of fair words. This is the lovely and noble side of his character. Indignation at this will make him forget crops and cattle : and this, after so many centuries, will give him at last a poet in the monk of Eisleben, who shall cut deep on the memory of mankind that brief creed of conscience—"Here am I: God help me: I cannot otherwise." This, it seems to me, with dogged sense of justice—both results of that equilibrium of thought which springs from clear-sighted understanding—makes the beauty of the Saxon nature.

He believes in another world, and conceives of it without metaphysical subtleties as something very much after the pattern of this, but infinitely more desirable. Witness the vision of John Bunyan. Once beat it into him that his eternal *well-being*, as he calls it, depends on certain conditions, that only so will the balance in the ledger of eternity be in his favour, and the man who seemed wholly of *this* world will give all that he has, even his life, with a superb simplicity and scorn of the theatric, for a chance in the next. Hard to move, his very solidity of nature makes him terrible when once fairly set agoing. He is the man of all others slow to admit the thought of revolution; but let him once admit it, he will carry it through and make it *stick*—a secret hitherto undiscoverable by other races.

But poetry is not made out of the understanding ; that is not the sort of block out of which you can carve wing-footed Mercuries. The question of common-sense is always, "What is it good for?"—a question which would abolish the rose and be answered triumphantly by the cabbage. The danger of the prosaic type of mind lies in the stolid sense of superiority which blinds it to everything ideal, to the use of anything that does not serve the practical purposes of life. Do we not remember how the all-observing and all-fathoming Shakespeare has typified this in Bottom, the weaver? Surrounded by all the fairy creations of fancy, he sends one to fetch him the bag of a humble-bee, and can find no better employment for Mustard-seed than to help Cavalero Cobweb

scratch his ass's head between the ears. When Titania, queen of that fair ideal world, offers him a feast of beauty, he says he has a good stomach to a pottle of hay!

The Anglo-Saxons never had any real literature of their own. They produced monkish chronicles in bad Latin, and legends of saints in worse metre. Their earlier poetry is essentially Scandinavian. It was that *gens inclytissima Northmannorum* that imported the divine power of imagination—that power which, mingled with the solid Saxon understanding, produced at last the miracle of Stratford. It was to this adventurous race, which found America before Columbus, which, for the sake of freedom of thought, could colonise inhospitable Iceland, which, as it were, typifying the very action of the imaginative faculty itself, identified itself always with what it conquered, that we owe whatever aquiline features there are in the national physiognomy of the English race. It was through the Normans that the English mind and fancy, hitherto provincial and uncouth, were first infused with the lightness, grace, and self-confidence of Romance literature. They seem to have opened a window to the southward in that solid and somewhat sombre insular character, and it was a painted window all aglow with the figures of tradition and poetry. The old Gothic volume, grim with legends of devilish temptation and satanic lore, they illuminated with the gay and brilliant inventions of a softer climate and more genial moods. Even the stories of Arthur and his knights, toward which the stern Dante himself relented so far as to call them *gratissimas ambages*—most delightful circumlocutions—though of British origin, were first set free from the dungeon of a barbarous dialect by the French poets, and so brought back to England, and made popular there by the Normans.

Chaucer, to whom French must have been almost as truly a mother tongue as English, was familiar with all that had been done by Troubadour or Trouvère. In him we see the first result of the Norman yeast upon the home-baked Saxon loaf. The flour had been honest, the paste well

kneaded, but the inspiring leaven was wanting till the Norman brought it over. Chaucer works still in the solid material of his race, but with what airy lightness has he not infused it! Without ceasing to be English, he has escaped from being insular. But he was something more than this; he was a scholar, a thinker, and a critic. He had studied the *Divina Commedia* of Dante, he had read Petrarca and Boccaccio, and some of the Latin poets. He calls Dante the great poet of Italy, and Petrarch a learned clerk. It is plain that he knew very well the truer purpose of poetry, and had even arrived at the higher wisdom of comprehending the aptitudes and limitations of his own genius. He saw clearly and felt keenly what were the faults and what the wants of the prevailing literature of his country. In the "Monk's Tale" he slily satirises the long-winded morality of Gower, as his prose antitype Fielding was to satirise the prolix sentimentality of Richardson. In the rhyme of Sir Thopas he gives the *coup de grace* to the romances of Chivalry, and in his own choice of a subject he heralds that new world in which the actual and the popular were to supplant the fantastic and the heroic.

Before Chaucer, modern Europe had given birth to one great poet, Dante; and contemporary with him was one supremely elegant one, Petrarch. Dante died only seven years before Chaucer was born, and, so far as culture is derived from books, the moral and intellectual influences they had been subjected to, the speculative stimulus that may have given an impulse to their minds—there could have been no essential difference between them. Yet there are certain points of resemblance and of contrast, and those not entirely fanciful, which seem to me of considerable interest. Both were of mixed race, Dante certainly, Chaucer presumably so. Dante seems to have inherited on the Teutonic side the strong moral sense, the almost nervous irritability of conscience, and the tendency to mysticism which made him the first of Christian poets—first in point of time and first in point of greatness. From the other side he seems to have received almost in overplus a feeling

of order and proportion, sometimes well-nigh hardening into mathematical precision and formalism—a tendency which at last brought the poetry of the Romanic races to a deadlock of artifice and decorum. Chaucer, on the other hand, drew from the South a certain airiness of sentiment and expression, a felicity of phrase, and an elegance of turn hitherto unprecedented and hardly yet matched in our literature, but all the while kept firm hold of his native soundness of understanding, and that genial humour which seems to be the proper element of worldly wisdom. With Dante, life represented the passage of the soul from a state of nature to a state of grace; and there would have been almost an even chance whether (as Burns says) the *Divina Commedia* had turned out a song or a sermon, but for the wonderful genius of its author, which has compelled the sermon to sing and the song to preach, whether they would or no. With Chaucer, life is a pilgrimage, but only that his eye may be delighted with the varieties of costume and character. There are good morals to be found in Chaucer, but they are always incidental. With Dante the main question is the saving of the soul, with Chaucer it is the conduct of life. The distance between them is almost that between holiness and prudence. Dante applies himself to the realities and Chaucer to the scenery of life, and the former is consequently the more universal poet, as the latter is the more truly national one. Dante represents the justice of God, and Chaucer his loving-kindness. If there is anything that may properly be called satire in the one, it is like a blast of the Divine wrath, before which the wretches cower and tremble, which rends away their cloaks of hypocrisy and their masks of worldly propriety, and leaves them shivering in the cruel nakedness of their shame. The satire of the other is genial with the broad sunshine of humour, into which the victims walk forth with a delightful unconcern, laying aside of themselves the disguises that seem to make them uncomfortably warm, till they have made a thorough betrayal of themselves so unconsciously that we almost pity while we laugh. Dante shows us the

punishment of sins against God and one's neighbour, in order that we may shun them, and so escape the doom that awaits them in the other world. Chaucer exposes the cheats of the transmuter of metals, of the begging friars, and of the pedlars of indulgences, in order that we may be on our guard against them in this world. If we are to judge of what is national only by the highest and most characteristic types, surely we cannot fail to see in Chaucer the true forerunner and prototype of Shakespeare, who, with an imagination of far deeper grasp, a far wider reach of thought, yet took the same delight in the pageantry of the actual world, and whose moral is the moral of worldly wisdom only heightened to the level of his wide-viewing mind, and made typical by the dramatic energy of his plastic nature.

Yet if Chaucer had little of that organic force of life which so inspires the poem of Dante that, as he himself says of the heavens, part answers to part with mutual interchange of light, he had a structural faculty which distinguishes him from all other English poets, his contemporaries, and which indeed is the primary distinction of poets properly so called. There is, to be sure, only one other English writer coeval with himself who deserves in any way to be compared with him, and that rather for contrast than for likeness.

With the single exception of Langland, the English poets, his contemporaries, were little else than bad versifiers of legends classic or mediæval, as happened, without selection and without art. Chaucer is the first who broke away from the dreary traditional style, and gave not merely stories, but lively *pictures* of real life as the ever-renewed substance of poetry. He was a reformer, too, not only in literature, but in morals. But as in the former his exquisite tact saved him from all eccentricity, so in the latter the pervading sweetness of his nature could never be betrayed into harshness and invective. He seems incapable of indignation. He mused good-naturedly over the vices and follies of men, and, never forgetting that he was fashioned of the same clay, is rather apt to pity than condemn. There

is no touch of cynicism in all he wrote. Dante's brush seems sometimes to have been smeared with the burning pitch of his own fiery lake. Chaucer's pencil is dipped in the cheerful colour-box of the old illuminators, and he has their patient delicacy of touch, with a freedom far beyond their somewhat mechanic brilliancy.

English narrative poetry, as Chaucer found it, though it had not altogether escaped from the primal curse of long-windedness so painfully characteristic of its prototype, the French Romance of Chivalry, had certainly shown a feeling for the picturesque, a sense of colour, a directness of phrase, and a simplicity of treatment, which give it graces of its own and a turn peculiar to itself. In the easy knack of story-telling, the popular minstrels cannot compare with Marie de France. The lightsomeness of fancy, that leaves a touch of sunshine and is gone, is painfully missed in them all. Their incidents enter dispersedly, as the old stage directions used to say, and they have not learned the art of concentrating their force on the key-point of their hearers' interest. They neither get fairly hold of their subject, nor, what is more important, does it get hold of them. But they sometimes yield to an instinctive hint of leaving-off at the right moment, and in their happy negligence achieve an effect only to be matched by the highest successes of art.

> "That lady heard his mourning all
> Right under her chamber wall,
> In her oriel where she was,
> Closed well with royal glass;
> Fulfilled it was with imagery
> Every window, by and by;
> On each side had there a gin
> Sperred with many a divers pin;
> Anon that lady fair and free
> Undid a pin of ivory
> And wide the window she open set,
> The sun shone in at her closet."

It is true the old rhymer relapses a little into the habitual drone of his class, and shows half a mind to bolt into their common inventory style when he comes to his *gins* and

*pins*, but he withstands the temptation manfully, and his sunshine fills our hearts with a gush as sudden as that which illumines the lady's oriel. Coleridge and Keats have each in his way felt the charm of this winsome picture, but have hardly equalled its hearty honesty, its economy of material, the supreme test of artistic skill. I admit that the phrase "*had* there a gin" is suspicious, and suggests a French original, but I remember nothing altogether so good in the romances from the other side of the Channel. One more passage occurs to me, almost incomparable in its simple straightforward force and choice of the right word.

> "Sir Graysteel to his death thus thraws,
> He welters [wallows] and the grass updraws;
> . . . . . .
> A little while then lay he still,
> (Friends that saw him liked full ill)
> And bled into his armour bright."

The last line, for suggestive reticence, almost deserves to be put beside the famous

> "Quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante"

of the great master of laconic narration. In the same poem* the growing love of the lady, in its maidenliness of unconscious betrayal, is touched with a delicacy and tact as surprising as they are delightful. But such passages, which are the despair of poets who have to work in a language that has faded into diction, are exceptional. They are to be set down rather to good luck than to art. Even the stereotyped similes of these fortunate alliterates, like "weary as water in a weir," or "glad as grass is of the rain," are new, like nature, at the thousandth repetition. Perhaps our palled taste overvalues the wild flavour of these wayside treasure-troves. They are wood-strawberries, prized in proportion as we must turn over more leaves ere we find one. This popular literature is of value in helping

* *Sir Eger and Sir Grime* in the Percy Folio. The passage quoted is from Ellis.

us toward a juster estimate of Chaucer by showing what the mere language was capable of, and that all it wanted was a poet to put it through its paces. For though the poems I have quoted be, in their present form, later than he, they are, after all, but modernised versions of older copies, which they doubtless reproduce with substantial fidelity.

It is commonly assumed that Chaucer did for English what Dante is supposed to have done for Italian and Luther for German, that he, in short, in some hitherto inexplicable way, created it. But this is to speak loosely and without book. Languages are never made in any such fashion, still less are they the achievement of any single man, however great his genius, however powerful his individuality. They shape themselves by laws as definite as those which guide and limit the growth of other living organisms. Dante, indeed, has told us that he chose to write in the tongue that might be learned of nurses and chafferers in the market. His practice shows that he knew perfectly well that poetry has needs which cannot be answered by the vehicle of vulgar commerce between man and man. What he instinctively felt was, that there was the living heart of all speech, without whose help the brain were powerless to send will, motion, meaning, to the limbs and extremities. But it is true that a language, as respects the uses of literature, is liable to a kind of syncope. No matter how complete its vocabulary may be, how thorough an outfit of inflections and case-endings it may have, it is a mere dead body without a soul till some man of genius set its arrested pulses once more athrob, and show what wealth of sweetness, scorn, persuasion, and passion lay there awaiting its liberator. In this sense it is hardly too much to say that Chaucer, like Dante, found his native tongue a dialect and left it a language. But it was not what he did with deliberate purpose of reform, it was his kindly and plastic genius that wrought this magic of renewal and inspiration. It was not the new words he introduced,* but his way of using the old ones, that surprised them into

* I think he tried one now and then, like "eyen *columbine*."

grace, ease, and dignity in their own despite. In order to feel fully how much he achieved, let any one subject himself to a penitential course of reading in his contemporary, Gower, who worked in a material to all intents and purposes the same, or listen for a moment to the barbarous jangle which Lydgate and Occleve contrive to draw from the instrument their master had tuned so deftly. Gower has positively raised tediousness to the precision of science, he has made dulness an heirloom for the students of our literary history. As you slip to and fro on the frozen levels of his verse, which give no foothold to the mind, as your nervous ear awaits the inevitable recurrence of his rhyme, regularly pertinacious as the tick of an eight-day clock, and reminding you of Wordsworth's

> "Once more the ass did lengthen out
> The hard, dry, seesaw of his horrible bray,"

you learn to dread, almost to respect, the powers of this indefatigable man. He is the undertaker of the fair mediæval legend, and his style has the hateful gloss, the seemingly unnatural length, of a coffin. Love, beauty, passion, nature, art, life, the natural and theological virtues,—there is nothing beyond his power to disenchant, nothing out of which the tremendous hydraulic press of his allegory (or whatever it is, for I am not sure if it be not something even worse) will not squeeze all feeling and freshness and leave it a juiceless pulp. It matters not where you try him, whether his story be Christian or pagan, borrowed from history or fable, you cannot escape him. Dip in at the middle or the end, dodge back to the beginning, the patient old man is there to take you by the button and go on with his imperturbable narrative. You may have left off with Clytemnestra, and you may begin again with Samson; it makes no odds, for you cannot tell one from t'other. His tediousness is omnipresent, and like Dogberry he could find in his heart to bestow it all (and more if he had it) on your worship. The word *lengthy* has been charged to our American account, but it must have been

invented by the first reader of Gower's works, the only inspiration of which they were ever capable. Our literature had to lie by and recruit for more than four centuries ere it could give us an equal vacuity in Tupper, so persistent a uniformity of commonplace in the "Recreations of a Country Parson." Let us be thankful that the industrious Gower never found time for recreation!

But a fairer as well as more instructive comparison lies between Chaucer and the author of "Piers Ploughman." Langland has as much tenderness, as much interest in the varied picture of life, as hearty a contempt for hypocrisy, and almost an equal sense of fun. He has the same easy abundance of matter. But what a difference! It is the difference between the poet and the man of poetic temperament. The abundance of the one is a continual fulness within the fixed limits of good taste; that of the other is squandered in overflow. The one can be profuse on occasion; the other is diffuse whether he will or no. The one is full of talk; the other is garrulous. What in one is the refined *bonhomie* of a man of the world, is a rustic shrewdness in the other. Both are kindly in their satire, and have not (like too many reformers) that vindictive love of virtue which spreads the stool of repentance with thistle-burrs before they invite the erring to seat themselves therein. But what in "Piers Ploughman" is sly fun, has the breadth and depth of humour in Chaucer; and it is plain that while the former was taken up by his moral purpose, the main interest of the latter turned to perfecting the form of his work. In short, Chaucer had that fine literary sense which is as rare as genius, and, united with it, as it was in him, assures an immortality of fame. It is not merely what he has to say, but even more the agreeable way he has of saying it, that captivates our attention and gives him an assured place in literature. Above all, it is not in detached passages that his charm lies, but in the entirety of expression and the cumulative effect of many particulars working toward a common end. Now though *ex ungue leonem* be a good rule in comparative anatomy, its application, except

in a very limited way, in criticism is sure to mislead; for we should always bear in mind that the really great writer is great in the mass, and is to be tested less by his cleverness in the elaboration of parts than by that *reach* of mind which is incapable of random effort, which selects, arranges, combines, rejects, denies itself the cheap triumph of immediate effects, because it is absorbed by the controlling charm of proportion and unity. A careless good-luck of phrase is delightful; but criticism cleaves to the teleological argument, and distinguishes the creative intellect, not so much by any happiness of natural endowment as by the marks of design. It is true that one may sometimes discover by a single verse whether an author have imagination, or may make a shrewd guess whether he have style or no, just as by a few spoken words you may judge of a man's accent; but the true artist in language is never spotty, and needs no guide-boards of admiring italics, a critical method introduced by Leigh Hunt, whose feminine temperament gave him acute perceptions at the expense of judgment. This is the Bœotian method, which offers us a brick as a sample of the house, forgetting that it is not the goodness of the separate bricks, but the way in which they are put together, that brings them within the province of art, and makes the difference between a heap and a house. A great writer does not reveal himself here and there, but everywhere. Langland's verse runs mostly like a brook, with a beguiling and well-nigh slumberous prattle, but he, more often than any writer of his class, flashes into salient lines, gets inside our guard with the home-thrust of a forthright word, and he gains if taken piece-meal. His imagery is naturally and vividly picturesque, as where he says of Old Age,—

> "Eld the hoar
> That was in the vauntward,
> And bare the banner before death,—

and he softens to a sweetness of sympathy beyond Chaucer when he speaks of the poor or tells us that Mercy is "sib of all sinful;" but to compare "Piers Ploughman" with the "Canterbury Tales" is to compare sermon with song.

Let us put a bit of Langland's satire beside one of Chaucer's. Some people in search of Truth meet a pilgrim and ask him whence he comes. He gave a long list of holy places, appealing for proof to the relics on his hat:—

> " 'I have walked full wide in wet and in dry
> And sought saints for my soul's health.'
> 'Know'st thou ever a relic that is called Truth?
> Couldst thou show us the way where that wight dwelleth?
> 'Nay, so God help me,' said the man then,
> 'I saw never palmer with staff nor with scrip
> Ask after him ever till now in this place.'"

This is a good hit, and the poet is satisfied; but, in what I am going to quote from Chaucer, everything becomes picture, over which lies broad and warm the sunshine of humorous fancy.

> " In oldë dayës of the King Artour
> Of which that Britouns speken gret honour,
> All was this lond fulfilled of fayerie:
> The elf-queen with her joly compaignie
> Dancëd ful oft in many a grenë mede:
> This was the old opinion as I rede;
> I speke of many hundrid yer ago:
> But now can no man see none elvës mo,
> For now the gretë charite and prayëres
> Of lymytours and other holy freres
> That sechen every lond and every streem,
> As thick as motis in the sonnëbeam,
> Blessyng halles, chambres, kitchenës, and boures,
> Citees, and burghës, castels hihe and toures,
> Thorpës and bernes, shepnes and dayeries,
> This makith that ther ben no fayeries.
> For ther as wont to walken was an elf
> There walkith none but the lymytour himself,
> In undermelës and in morwenynges,
> And sayth his matyns and his holy thinges,
> As he goth in his lymytatioun.
> Wommen may now go saufly up and doun;
> In every bush or under every tre
> There is none other incubus but he,
> And he ne wol doon hem no dishonóur."

How cunningly the contrast is suggested here between the Elf-queen's jolly company and the unsocial limiters, thick as

motes in the sunbeam, yet each walking by himself! And with what an air of innocent unconsciousness is the deadly thrust of the last verse given, with its contemptuous emphasis on the *he* that seems so well-meaning! Even Shakespeare, who seems to come in after everybody has done his best with a "Let me take hold a minute and show you how to do it," could not have bettered this.

"Piers Ploughman" is the best example I know of what is called popular poetry—of compositions, that is, which contain all the simpler elements of poetry, but still in solution, not crystallised around any thread of artistic purpose. In it appears at her best the Anglo-Saxon Muse, a first cousin of Poor Richard, full of proverbial wisdom, who always brings her knitting in her pocket, and seems most at home in the chimney-corner. It is genial; it plants itself firmly on human nature with its rights and wrongs; it has a surly honesty, prefers the downright to the gracious, and conceives of speech as a tool rather than a musical instrument. If we should seek for a single word that would define it most precisely, we should not choose simplicity, but homeliness. There is more or less of this in all early poetry, to be sure; but I think it especially proper to English poets, and to the most English among them, like Cowper, Crabbe, and one is tempted to add Wordsworth—where he forget's Coleridge's private lectures. In reading such poets as Langland, also, we are not to forget a certain charm of distance in the very language they use, making it unhackneyed without being alien. As it is the chief function of the poet to make the familiar novel, these fortunate early risers of literature, who gather phrases with the dew still on them, have their poetry done for them, as it were, by their vocabulary. But in Chaucer, as in all great poets, the language gets its charm from him. The force and sweetness of his genius kneaded more kindly together the Latin and Teutonic elements of our mother tongue, and made something better than either. The necessity of writing poetry, and not mere verse, made him a reformer whether he would or no; and the instinct of his finer ear

was a guide such as none before him or contemporary with him, nor indeed any that came after him, till Spenser, could command. Gower had no notion of the uses of rhyme except as a kind of crease at the end of every eighth syllable, where the verse was to be folded over again into another layer. He says, for example,

> "This maiden Canacee was hight,
> Both in the day and eke by night,"

as if people commonly changed their names at dark. And he could not even contrive to say this without the clumsy pleonasm of *both* and *eke*. Chaucer was put to no such shifts of piecing out his metre with loose-woven bits of baser stuff. He himself says, in the "Man of Law's Tale,"—

> "Me lists not of the chaff nor of the straw
> To make so long a tale as of the corn."

One of the world's three or four great story-tellers, he was also one of the best versifiers that ever made English trip and sing with a gaiety that seems careless, but where every foot beats time to the tune of the thought. By the skilful arrangement of his pauses he evaded the monotony of the couplet, and gave to the rhymed pentameter, which he made our heroic measure, something of the architectural repose of blank verse. He found our language lumpish, stiff, unwilling, too apt to speak Saxonly in grouty monosyllables; he left it enriched with the longer measure of the Italian and Provençal poets. He reconciled, in the harmony of his verse, the English bluntness with the dignity and elegance of the less homely Southern speech. Though he did not and could not create our language (for he who writes to be read does not write for linguisters), yet it is true that he first made it easy, and to that extent modern, so that Spenser, two hundred years later, studied his method and called him master. He first wrote *English;* and it was a feeling of this, I suspect, that made it fashionable in Elizabeth's day to "talk pure Chaucer." Already we find in his

works verses that might pass without question in Milton or even Wordsworth, so mainly unchanged have the language of poetry and the movement of verse remained from his day to our own.

"Thou Polymnia
On Pérnaso, that, with* thy sisters glade,
By Helicon, not far from Cirrea,
Singest with voice memorial in the shade,
Under the laurel which that may not fade.

And downward from a hill under a bent
There stood the temple of Mars omnipotent
Wrought all of burnëd steel, of which th' entrée
Was long and strait and ghastly for to see:
The northern light in at the doorës shone
For window in the wall ne was there none
Through which men mighten any light discerne;
The dore was all of adamant eterne."

And here are some lines that would not seem out of place in the "Paradise of Dainty Devises:"—

"Hide, Absolom, thy giltë [gilded] tresses clear,
Esther lay thou thy meekness all adown.
. . . . . .
Make of your wifehood no comparison;
Hide ye your beauties Ysoude and Elaine,
My lady cometh, that all this may distain."

When I remember Chaucer's malediction upon his scrivener, and consider that by far the larger proportion of his verses (allowing always for change of pronunciation) are perfectly accordant with our present accentual system, I cannot believe that he ever wrote an imperfect line. His ear would never have tolerated the verses of nine syllables, with a strong accent on the first, attributed to him by Mr. Skeate and Mr. Morris. Such verses seem to me simply impossible in the pentameter iambic as Chaucer wrote it. A great deal of misapprehension would be avoided in discussing English metres, if it were only understood that quantity in Latin and quantity in English mean very different things. Perhaps the best quantitative verses in

* Commonly printed *hath*.

our language (better even than Coleridge's) are to be found in Mother Goose, composed by nurses wholly by ear and beating time as they danced the baby on their knee. I suspect Chaucer and Shakespeare would be surprised into a smile by the learned arguments which supply their halting verses with every kind of excuse except that of being readable. When verses were written to be chanted, more licence could be allowed, for the ear tolerates the widest deviations from habitual accent in words that are sung, *Segnius irritant demissa per aurem.* To some extent the same thing is true of anapæstic and other tripping measures, but we cannot admit it in marching tunes like those of Chaucer. He wrote for the eye more than for the voice, as poets had begun to do long before.* Some loose talk of Coleridge, loose in spite of its affectation of scientific precision, about "retardations" and the like, has misled many honest persons into believing that they can make good verse out of bad prose. Coleridge himself, from natural fineness of ear, was the best metrist among modern English poets, and, read with proper allowances, his remarks upon versification are always instructive to whoever is not rhythm-deaf. But one has no patience with the dyspondæuses, the pæon primuses, and what not, with which he darkens verses that are to be explained only by

* Froissart's description of the book of traités amoureux et de moralité, which he had engrossed for presentation to Richard II. in 1394, is enough to bring tears to the eyes of a modern author. "Et lui plut très grandement; et plaire bien lui devoit, car il étoit enluminé, écrit et historié et couvert de vermeil velours à dis cloux d'argent dorés d'or, et roses d'or au milieu, et à deux grands fremaulx dorés et richement ouvrés au milieu de rosiers d'or." How lovingly he lingers over it, hooking it together with *et* after *et!* But two centuries earlier, while the *jongleurs* were still in full song, poems were also read aloud.

> " Pur remembrer des ancessours
> Les faits et les dits et les mours,
> Deit l'en les livres et les gestes
> Et les estoires *lire a festes.*"—*Roman du Rou.*

But Chaucer wrote for the private reading of the closet.

the contemporary habits of pronunciation. Till after the time of Shakespeare we must always bear in mind that it is not a language of books but living speech that we have to deal with. Of this language Coleridge had little knowledge, except what could be acquired through the ends of his fingers as they lazily turned the leaves of his haphazard reading. If his eye was caught by a single passage that gave him a chance to theorise, he did not look farther. Speaking of Massinger, for example, he says, "When a speech is interrupted, or one of the characters speaks aside, the last syllable of the former speech and first of the succeeding Massinger counts for one, because both are supposed to be spoken at the same moment.

> "'And felt the sweetness *of't*
> *How* her mouth runs over.'"

Now fifty instances may be cited from Massinger which tell against this fanciful notion, for one that seems, and only seems, in its favour. Anyone tolerably familiar with the dramatists knows that in the passage quoted by Coleridge, the *how* being emphatic, "*how her*" was pronounced *how'r*. He tells us that Massinger is fond of the anapæst in the first and third foot, as :—

"Tŏ yoŭr mōre | thăn mās | cŭlinĕ rēa | sŏn thāt | cŏmmānds 'ĕm.‖"

Likewise of the second pæon (⏑ – ⏑ ⏑) in the first foot, followed by four trochees (– ⏑), as :—

"Sŏ grēēdĭly | lōng fŏr, | knōw theĭr | tĭtĭll | ātiŏns."

In truth, he was no fonder of them than his brother dramatists who, like him, wrote for the voice by the ear. "To your" is still one syllable in ordinary speech, and "masculine" and "greedily" were and are dissyllables or trisyllables according to their place in the verse. Coleridge was making pedantry of a very simple matter. Yet he has said with perfect truth of Chaucer's verse, "Let a few plain rules be given for sounding the final *e* of syllables, and for expressing the terminations of such words as *oceän* and *natiön*, etc., as dissyllables,—or let the syllables to be

sounded in such cases be marked by a competent metrist. This simple expedient would, with a very few trifling exceptions, where the errors are inveterate, enable anyone to feel the perfect smoothness and harmony of Chaucer's verse." But let us keep widely clear of Latin and Greek terms of prosody! It is also more important here than even with the dramatists of Shakespeare's time to remember that we have to do with a language caught more from the ear than from books. The best school for learning to understand Chaucer's elisions, compressions, slurrings-over and runnings-together of syllables is to listen to the habitual speech of rustics with whom language is still plastic to meaning, and hurries or prolongs itself accordingly. Here is a contraction frequent in Chaucer, and still common in New England :—

> "But me were lever than [lever'n] all this town, quod he."

Let one example suffice for many. To Coleridge's rules another should be added by a wise editor; and that is to restore the final *n* in the infinitive and third person plural of verbs, and in such other cases as can be justified by the authority of Chaucer himself. Surely his ear could never have endured the sing-song of such verses as

> "I couthe telle for a gowne-cloth,"

or

> "Than ye to me schuld breke youre trouthe."

Chaucer's measure is so uniform (making due allowances) that words should be transposed or even omitted where the verse manifestly demands it,—and with copyists so long and dull of ear this is often the case. Sometimes they leave out a needful word :—

> "But er [the] thunder stynte, there cometh rain,
> When [that] we ben yflattered and ypraised,
> Tak [ye] him for the greatest gentleman."

Sometimes they thrust in a word or words that hobble the verse :—

"She trowed he were yfel in [some] maladie,
Ye faren like a man [that] had lost his wit,
Then have I got of you the maystrie, quod she,
(Then have I got the maystery, quod she)
And quod the jugë [also] thou must lose thy head."

Sometimes they give a wrong word identical in meaning:—

"And therwithal he knew [couthë] mo proverbes."

Sometimes they change the true order of the words:—

"Therefore no woman of clerkës is [is of clerkës] praised
His felaw lo, here he stont [stont he] hool on live."

"He that covèteth is a porë wight
For he wold have that is not in his might;
But he that nought hath ne coveteth nought to have."

Here the "but" of the third verse belongs at the head of the first, and we get rid of the anomaly of "coveteth" differently accented within two lines. Nearly all the seemingly unmetrical verses may be righted in this way. I find a good example of this in the last stanza of "Troilus and Creseide." As it stands, we read—

"Thou one, two, and three, eterne on live
That raignast aie in three, two and one."

It is plain that we should read "one *and* two" in the first verse, and "three *and* two" in the second. Remembering, then, that Chaucer was here translating Dante, I turned (after making the correction) to the original, and found as I expected

"Quell' uno *e* due e tre che sempre vive,
E regna sempre in tre *e* due ed uno." (Par. xiv. 28, 29.)

In the stanza before this we have—

"To thee and to the philosophic*all* strode,
To vouchsafe [vouchësafe] there need is, to correct;

and further on—

"With all mine herte' of mercy ever I pray
And to the Lord aright thus I speake and say,"

where we must either strike out the second "I," or put it after "speake."

One often finds such changes made by ear justified by the readings in other texts, and we cannot but hope that the Chaucer Society will give us the means of at last settling upon a version which shall make the poems of one of the most fluent of metrists at least readable. Let any one compare the "Franklin's Tale" in the Aldine edition* with the text given by Wright, and he will find both sense and metre clear themselves up in a surprising way. A careful collation of texts, by the way, confirms one's confidence in Tyrwhitt's good taste and thoroughness.

A writer in the "Proceedings of the Philological Society" has lately undertaken to prove that Chaucer did not sound the final or medial *e*, and throws us back on the old theory that he wrote "riding-rime," that is, verse to the eye and not the ear. This he attempts to do by showing that the Anglo-Norman poets themselves did not sound the *e*, or, at any rate, were not uniform in so doing. It should seem a sufficient answer to this merely to ask whence modern French poetry derived its rules of pronunciation so like those of Chaucer, so different from those of prose. But it is not enough to prove that some of the Anglo-Norman rhymers were bad versifiers. Let us look for examples in the works of the best poet among them all, Marie de France, with whose works Chaucer was certainly familiar. What was *her* practice? I open at random and find enough to overthrow the whole theory:—

"Od sa fillë† ke le cela—
Tut li curagës li fremi—
Di mei, fet-elë par ta fei—
La Dameiselë l'aporta—
Kar ne li sembla mië boens—
La damë l'aveit apelée—
Et la merë l'areisuna."

* One of the very worst, be it said in passing.

† Whence came, pray, the Elizabethan *commandëment chapëlain, surëty*, and a score of others? Whence the Scottish *bonny*, and so many English words of Romance derivation ending in *y*?

But how about the elision?

> " Le pali' *e*sgardë sur le lit—
> Et ele' *e*st devant li alée—
> Bele' amië [cf. mië, above] ne'l me celez.
> La dame' ad sa fille' amenée."

These are all on a single page,* and there are some to spare. How about the *hiatus*? On the same page I find—

> " Kar l'Ercëveskë *i e*stoit—
> Pur eus beneistre' *e* enseiner.

What was the practice of Wace? Again I open at random.

> " N'osa remaindre' en Normandië,
> Maiz, quant la guerrë fu finië,
> Od sou herneiz en Puille' *a*la—
> Cil de Baienës lungëment—
> Ne *i* nes pout par forcë prendre—
> Dunc la vilë mult amendout,
> Prisons e preiës amenout."†

Again we have the sounded final *e*, the elision, and the *hiatus*. But what possible reason is there for supposing that Chaucer would go to obscure minstrels to learn the rules of French versification? Nay, why are we to suppose that he followed them at all? In his case as in theirs, as in that of the Italians, with the works of whose two greater poets he was familiar, it was the language itself and the usuges of pronunciation that guided the poet, and not arbitrary laws laid down by a synod of versemakers. Chaucer's verse differs from that of Gower and Lydgate precisely as the verse of Spenser differs from that of Gascoigne, and for the same reason—that he was a great poet, to whom measure was a natural vehicle. But admitting that he must have formed his style on the French poets, would he not have gone for lessons to the most famous and popular among them—the authors of the "Roman de la Rose?" Wherever you open that poem,

* Poésies de Marie de France, tome i. p. 168.
† Le Roman de la Rose, tome ii. p. 390.

you find Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung following precisely the same method—a method not in the least arbitrary, but inherent in the material which they wrought. The *e* sounded or absorbed under the same conditions, the same slurring of the diphthongs, the same occasional *hiatus*, the same compression of several vowels into one sound where they immediately follow each other. Shakespeare and Milton would supply examples enough of all these practices that seem so incredible to those who write about versification without sufficient fineness of sense to feel the difference between Ben Jonson's blank verse and Marlowe's. Some men are verse-deaf as others are colour-blind—Messrs. Malone and Guest, for example.

I try Rutebeuf in the same haphazard way, and chance brings me upon his "Pharisian." This poem is in stanzas, the verses of the first of which have all of them masculine rhymes, those of the second feminine ones, and so on in such continual alternation to the end, as to show that it was done with intention to avoid monotony. Of feminine rhymes we find ypocrisië, famë, justicë, mesurë, yglisë. But did Rutebeuf mean so to pronounce them? I open again at the poem of the *Secrestain*, which is written in regular octosyllabics, and read—

> "Envië fet homë tuer,
> Et si fait bounë remuer—
> Envië greve', envië blecë,
> Envië confont charitë
> Envie' ocist humilitë,—
> Estoit en ce païs en vië
> Sanz orgueil ere' et sanz envië—
> La glorieusë, damë, chierë."*

Froissart was Chaucer's contemporary. What was his usage?

> "J'avoië fait en ce voiagë
> Et je li di, 'Ma damë s'ai-je
> Pour vous ëu maint souvenir';
> Mais je ne sui pas bien hardis

* Rutebeuf, tome i. pp. 203 seqq. 304 seqq.

De vous remonstrer, damë chierë,
Par quel art ne par quel manierë,
J'ai ëu ce comencëment
De l'amourous atouchëment."

If we try Philippe Mouskes, a mechanical rhymer, if ever there was one, and therefore the surer not to let go the leading-strings of rule, the result is the same.

But Chaucer, it is argued, was not uniform in his practice. Would this be likely? Certainly with those terminations (like *courtesiè*) which are questioned, and in diphthongs generally. Dante took precisely the same liberties.

"Fac*ea* le stelle a n*oi* parer più radi,
Nè fu per fantas*ia* giamm*ai* compreso,
P*oi* p*iovve* dentro all' alta fantas*ia*,
Sol*ea* valor e cortes*ia* trovarsi,
Che ne 'nvogliava amor e cortes*ia*."

Here we have *fantasì* and *fantasiä*, *cortesì* and *cortesiä*. Even Pope has *promiscuous*, *obsequious*, as trisyllables, *individual* as a quadrisyllable, and words like *tapestry*, *opera*, indifferently as trochees or dactyls according to their place in the verse. Donne even goes so far as to make Cain a monosyllable and dissyllable in the same verse:—

"Sister and wife to Cain, Caïn that first did plough."

The cæsural pause (a purely imaginary thing in accentual metres) may be made to balance a line like this of Donne's,

"Are they not like | singers at doors for meat,"

but we defy anyone by any trick of voice to make it supply a missing syllable in what is called our heroic measure, so mainly used by Chaucer.

Enough and far more than enough on a question about which it is as hard to be patient as about the authorship of Shakespeare's plays. It is easy to find all manner of bad metres among these versifiers, and plenty of inconsistencies, many or most of them the fault of careless or ignorant transcribers, but whoever has read them thoroughly, and

with enough philological knowledge of cognate langu ges to guide him, is sure that they at least aimed at regularity, precisely as he is convinced that Raynouard's rule about singular and plural terminations has plenty of evidence to sustain it, despite the numerous exceptions. To show what a bad versifier *could* make out of the same language that Chaucer used, I copy one stanza from a contemporary poem.

> "When Phebus fresh was in chare resplendent,
> In the moneth of May erly in a morning,
> I hard two lovers profer this argument
> In the yeere of our Lord a M. by rekening,
> CCCXL. and VIII. yeere following
> O potent princesse conserve true lovers all
> And grant them thy region and blisse celestial.*

Here is riding-rhyme, and on a very hard horse too! Can any one be insensible to the difference between such stuff as this and the measure of Chaucer? Is it possible that with him the one halting verse should be the rule, and the twenty musical ones the exception? Let us take heed to his own words:—

> "And, for there is so great diversitë
> In English, and in writing of our tong,
> So pray I God† that non miswritë the
> Ne the mismetre for defaut of tong,
> And redde whereso thou be or ellës song
> That thou be understood God I beseech."

Yet more. Boccaccio's *ottava rima* is almost as regular as that of Tasso. Was Chaucer unconscious of this? It will be worth while to compare a stanza of the original with one of the translation:—

> "Era cortese Ettore di natura
> Però vedendo di costei il gran pianto,
> Ch' era più bella ch' altra creatura,
> Con pio parlare comfortolla alquanto,
> Dicendo, lascia con la ria ventura

* From the "Craft of Lovers," attributed by Ritson to Lydgate, but too bad even for him.

† Here the received texts give "So pray I *to* God." Cf. "But Reason said him." T. & C.

Tuo padre andar che tutti ha offeso tanto,
E tu, sicura e lieta, senza noia,
Mentre t' aggrada, con noi resta in Troia." *

"Now was this Hector pitous of naturë,
And saw that she was sorrowful begon
And that she was so faire a creaturë,
Of his goodnesse he gladed her anon
And said [saidë] let your father's treason gon
Forth with mischance, and ye yourself in joy
Dwelleth with us while [that] you list in Troy."

If the Italian were read with the same ignorance that has wreaked itself on Chaucer, the riding-rhyme would be on its high horse in almost every line of Boccaccio's stanza. The same might be said of many a verse in Donne's satires. Spenser in his eclogues for February, May, and September evidently took it for granted that he had caught the measure of Chaucer, and it would be rather amusing, as well as instructive, to hear the maintainers of the hop-skip-and-jump theory of versification attempt to make the elder poet's verses dance to the tune for which one of our greatest metrists (in his philological deafness) supposed their feet to be trained.

I will give one more example of Chaucer's verse, again making my selection from one of his less mature works. He is speaking of Tarquin :—

"And ay the morë he was in despair
The more he coveted and thought her fair ;
His blindë lust was all his coveting.
On morrow when the bird began to sing
Unto the siege he cometh full privily
And by himself he walketh soberly
The imáge of her recording alway new :
Thus lay her hair, and thus fresh was her hue,
Thus sate, thus spake, thus span, this was her cheer,
Thus fair she was, and this was her manére.
All this conceit his heart hath new ytake,
And as the sea, with tempest all toshake,
That after, when the storm is all ago,
Yet will the water quap a day or two,
Right so, though that her formë were absént,
The pleasance of her forme was presént."

* Corrected from Kissner, p. 18.

And this passage leads me to say a few words of Chaucer as a descriptive poet; for I think it a great mistake to attribute to him any properly dramatic power as some have done. Even Herr Hertzburg, in his remarkably intelligent essay, is led a little astray on this point by his enthusiasm. Chaucer is a great narrative poet; and, in this species of poetry, though the author's personality should never be obtruded, it yet unconsciously pervades the whole, and communicates an individual quality—a kind of flavour of its own. This very quality, and it is one of the highest in its way and place, would be fatal to all dramatic force. The narrative poet is occupied with his characters as a picture, with their grouping, even their costume, it may be, and he feels for and with them instead of being they for the moment, as the dramatist must always be. The story-teller must possess the situation perfectly in all its details, while the imagination of the dramatist must be possessed and mastered by it. The latter puts before us the very passion or emotion itself in its utmost intensity; the former gives them, not in their primary form, but in that derivative one which they have acquired by passing through his own mind and being modified by his reflection. The deepest pathos of the drama, like the quiet "no more but so?" with which Shakespeare tells us that Ophelia's heart is bursting, is sudden as a stab, while in narrative it is more or less suffused with pity—a feeling capable of prolonged sustention. This presence of the author's own sympathy is noticeable in all Chaucer's pathetic passages, as, for instance, in the lamentation of Constance over her child in the "Man of Law's Tale." When he comes to the sorrow of his story, he seems to croon over his thoughts, to sooth them and dwell upon them with a kind of pleased compassion, as a child treats a wounded bird which he fears to grasp too tightly, and yet cannot make up his heart wholly to let go. It is true also of his humour that it pervades his comic tales like sunshine, and never dazzles the attention by a sudden flash. Sometimes he brings it in parenthetically, and insinuates a sarcasm so slyly as almost to slip by without

our notice, as where he satirises provincialism by the cock,

> "Who knew by nature each ascensiön
> Of the equinoctial in his native town."

Sometimes he turns round upon himself and smiles at a trip he has made into fine writing:—

> "Till that the brightë sun had lost his hue,
> For th' orisont had reft the sun his light,
> (This is as much to sayen as 'it was night.'")

Nay, sometimes it twinkles roguishly through his very tears, as in the

> "'Why wouldest thou be dead,' these women cry,
> 'Thou haddest gold enough—and Emily?'"

that follows so close upon the profoundly tender despair of Arcite's farewell:—

> "What is this world? What asken men to have?
> Now with his love now in the coldë grave
> Alone withouten any company!"

The power of diffusion without being diffuse would seem to be the highest merit of narration, giving it that easy flow which is so delightful. Chaucer's descriptive style is remarkable for its lowness of tone—for that combination of energy with simplicity which is among the rarest gifts in literature. Perhaps all is said in saying that he has style at all, for that consists mainly in the absence of undue emphasis and exaggeration, in the clear uniform pitch which penetrates our interest and retains it, where mere loudness would only disturb and irritate.

Not that Chaucer cannot be intense, too, on occasion; but it is with a quiet intensity of his own, that comes in as it were by accident.

> "Upon a thickë palfrey, paper-white,
> With saddle red embroidered with delight,
> Sits Dido:
> And she is fair as is the brightë morrow
> That healeth sickë folk of nightës sorrow.

Upon a courser startling as the fire,
Æneas sits."

Pandarus, looking at Troilus,

"Took up a light and found his countenance
As for to look upon an old romance."

With Chaucer it is always the thing itself and not the description of it that is the main object. His picturesque bits are incidental to the story, glimpsed in passing; they never stop the way. His key is so low that his high lights are never obtrusive. His imitators, like Leigh Hunt, and Keats in his "Endymion," missing the nice gradation with which the master toned everything down, become streaky. Hogarth, who reminds one of him in the variety and natural action of his figures, is like him also in the subdued brilliancy of his colouring. When Chaucer condenses, it is because his conception is vivid. He does not need to personify Revenge, for personification is but the subterfuge of unimaginative and professional poets; but he embodies the very passion itself in a verse that makes us glance over our shoulder as if we heard a stealthy tread behind us:—

"The smiler with the knife hid under the cloak.*"

And yet how unlike is the operation of the imaginative faculty in him and Shakespeare! When the latter describes, his epithet simply leaves always an impression on the moral sense (so to speak) of the person who hears or sees. The sun "flatters the mountain-tops with sovereign eye;" the bending "weeds lacquey the dull stream;" the shadow of the falcon "coucheth the fowl below;" the smoke is "helpless;" when Tarquin enters the chamber of Lucrece "the threshold grates the door to have him heard." His outward sense is merely a window through which the metaphysical eye looks forth, and his mind passes over at once from the simple sensation to the complex *meaning of* it—feels *with* the object instead of merely feeling it. His imagination is for ever dramatising. Chaucer gives only

* Compare this with the Mumbo-Jumbo Revenge in Collins's Ode.

the direct impression made on the eye or ear. He was the first great poet who really loved outward nature as the source of conscious pleasurable emotion. The Troubadour hailed the return of spring; but with him it was a piece of empty ritualism. Chaucer took a true delight in the new green of the leaves and the return of singing birds—a delight as simple as that of Robin Hood:—

> "In summer when the shaws be sheen,
> And leaves be large and long,
> It is full merry in fair forest
> To hear the small birds' song."

He has never so much as heard of the "burthen and the mystery of all this unintelligible world." His flowers and trees and birds have never bothered themselves with Spinoza. He himself sings more like a bird than any other poet, because it never occurred to him, as to Goethe, that he ought to do so. He pours himself out in sincere joy and thankfulness. When we compare Spenser's imitations of him with the original passages, we feel that the delight of the later poet was more in the expression than in the thing itself. Nature with him is only good to be transfigured by art. We walk among Chaucer's sights and sounds; we listen to Spenser's musical reproduction of them. In the same way, the pleasure which Chaucer takes in telling his stories has in itself the effect of consummate skill, and makes us follow all the windings of his fancy with sympathetic interest. His best tales run on like one of our inland rivers, sometimes hastening a little and turning upon themselves in eddies that dimple without retarding the current; sometimes loitering smoothly, while here and there a quiet thought, a tender feeling, a pleasant image, a golden-hearted verse, opens quietly as a water-lily, to float on the surface without breaking it into ripple. The vulgar intellectual palate hankers after the titillation of foaming phrase, and thinks nothing good for much that does not go off with a pop like a champagne cork. The mellow suavity of more precious vintages seems insipid: but the taste in proportion as it refines, learns to appreciate the indefinable flavour, too subtile for analysis. A manner has

prevailed of late in which every other word seems to be underscored as in a school-girl's letter. The poet seems intent on showing his sinew, as if the power of the slim Apollo lay in the girth of his biceps. Force for the mere sake of force ends like Milo, caught and held mockingly fast by the recoil of the log he undertook to rive. In the race of fame, there are a score capable of brilliant *spurts* for one who comes in winner after a steady pull with wind and muscle to spare. Chaucer never shows any signs of effort, and it is a main proof of his excellence that he can be so inadequately sampled by detached passages—by single lines taken away from the connection in which they contribute to the general effect. He has that continuity of thought, that evenly prolonged power, and that delightful equanimity, which characterise the higher orders of mind. There is something in him of the disinterestedness that made the Greeks masters in art. His phrase is never importunate. His simplicity is that of elegance, not of poverty. The quiet unconcern with which he says his best things is peculiar to him among English poets, though Goldsmith, Addison, and Thackeray have approached it in prose. He prattles inadvertently away, and all the while, like the princess in the story, lets fall a pearl at every other word. It is such a piece of good luck to be natural! It is the good gift which the fairy godmother brings to her prime favourites in the cradle. If not genius, it is alone what makes genius amiable in the arts. If a man have it not, he will never find it, for when it is sought it is gone.

When Chaucer describes anything, it is commonly by one of those simple and obvious epithets or qualities that are so easy to miss. Is it a woman? He tells us she is *fresh;* that she has *glad* eyes; that "every day her beauty newed:" that

> "Methought all fellowship as naked
> Withouten her that I saw once,
> As a corónе without the stones."

Sometimes he describes amply by the merest hint, as where the Friar, before setting himself softly down, drives away

the cat. We know without need of more words that he has chosen the snuggest corner. In some of his early poems he sometimes, it is true, falls into the catalogue style of his contemporaries; but after he had found his genius he never particularises too much—a process as deadly to all effect as an explanation to a pun. The first stanza of the "Clerk's Tale" gives us a landscape whose stately choice of objects shows a skill in composition worthy of Claude, the last artist who painted nature epically :—

> "There is at the west endë of Itaile,
> Down at the foot of Vesulus the cold,
> A lusty plain abundant of vitaile,
> Where many a tower and town thou may'st behold
> That founded were in time of fathers old,
> And many another delitable sight;
> And Sàlucës this noble country hight."

The Pre-Raphaelite style of landscape entangles the eye among the obtrusive weeds and grass-blades of the foreground which, in looking at a real bit of scenery, we overlook; but what a sweep of vision is here! and what happy generalisation in the sixth verse as the poet turns away to the business of his story! The whole is full of open air.

But it is in his characters, especially, that his manner is large and free; for he is painting history, though with the fidelity of portrait. He brings out strongly the essential traits, characteristic of the genus rather than of the individual. The Merchant who keeps so steady a countenance that

> "There wist no wight that he was e'er in debt,"

the Sergeant at Law, "who seemëd busier than he was," the Doctor of Medicine, whose "study was but little on the Bible,"—in all these cases it is the type and not the personage that fixes his attention. William Blake says truly, though he expresses his meaning somewhat clumsily, "the characters of Chaucer's Pilgrims are the characters which compose all ages and nations. Some of the names and titles are altered by time, but the characters remain for ever unaltered, and consequently they are the physiognomies

and lineaments of universal human life, beyond which Nature never steps. Names alter, things never alter. As Newton numbered the stars, and as Linnæus numbered the plants, so Chaucer numbered the classes of men." In his outside accessories, it is true, he sometimes seems as minute as if he were illuminating a missal. Nothing escapes his sure eye for the picturesque—the cut of the beard, the soil of armour on the buff jerkin, the rust on the sword, the expression of the eye. But in this he has an artistic purpose. It is here that he individualises, and, while every touch harmonises with and seems to complete the moral features of the character, makes us feel that we are among living men, and not the abstract images of men. Crabbe adds particular to particular, scattering rather than deepening the impression of reality, and making us feel as if every man were a species by himself; but Chaucer, never forgetting the essential sameness of human nature, makes it possible, and even probable, that his motley characters should meet on a common footing, while he gives to each the *expression* that belongs to him, the result of special circumstance or training. Indeed, the absence of any suggestion of *caste* cannot fail to strike any reader familiar with the literature on which he is supposed to have formed himself. No characters are at once so broadly human and so definitely outlined as his. Belonging, some of them, to extinct types, they continue contemporary and familiar for ever. So wide is the difference between knowing a great many men and that knowledge of human nature which comes of sympathetic insight and not of observation alone.

It is this power of sympathy which makes Chaucer's satire so kindly—more so, one is tempted to say, than the panegyric of Pope. Intellectual satire gets its force from personal or moral antipathy, and measures offences by some rigid conventional standard. Its mouth waters over a galling word, and it loves to say *Thou*, pointing out its victim to public scorn. *Indignatio facit versus*, it boasts, though they might as often be fathered on envy or hatred. But

imaginative satire, warmed through and through with the genial leaven of humour, smiles half sadly and murmurs *We*. Chaucer either makes one knave betray another, through a natural jealousy of competition, or else expose himself with a *naïveté* of good-humoured cynicism which amuses rather than disgusts. In the former case the butt has a kind of claim on our sympathy; in the latter, it seems nothing strange if the sunny atmosphere which floods that road to Canterbury should tempt anybody to throw off one disguise after another without suspicion. With perfect tact, too, the Host is made the *choragus* in this diverse company, and the coarse jollity of his temperament explains, if it does not excuse, much that would otherwise seem out of keeping. Surely nobody need have any scruples with *him*.

Chaucer seems to me to have been one of the most purely original of poets, as much so in respect of the world that is about us as Dante in respect of that which is within us. There had been nothing like him before, there has been nothing since. He is original, not in the sense that he thinks and says what nobody ever thought and said before, and what nobody can ever think and say again, but because he is always natural; because, if not always absolutely new, he is always delightfully fresh, because he sets before us the world as it honestly appeared to Geoffrey Chaucer, and not a world as it seemed proper to certain people that it ought to appear. He found that the poetry which had preceded him had been first the expression of individual feeling, then of class feeling as the vehicle of legend and history, and at last had well-nigh lost itself in chasing the mirage of allegory. Literature seemed to have passed through the natural stages which at regular intervals bring it to decline. Even the lyrics of the *jongleurs* were all run in one mould, and the Pastourelles of Northern France had become as artificial as the Pastorals of Pope. The Romances of chivalry had been made over into prose, and the *Melusine* of his contemporary Jehan d'Arras is the forlorn hope of the modern novel.

Arrived thus far in their decrepitude, the monks endeavoured to give them a religious and moral turn by allegorising them. Their process reminds one of something Ulloa tells us of the fashion in which the Spaniards converted the Mexicans: "Here we found an old man in a cavern so extremely aged as it was wonderful, which could neither see nor go because he was so lame and crooked. The Father, Friar Raimund, said it were good (seeing he was so aged) to make him a Christian; whereupon we baptised him." The monks found the Romances in the same stage of senility, and gave them a saving sprinkle with the holy water of allegory. Perhaps they were only trying to turn the enemy's own weapons against himself, for it was the free-thinking "Romance of the Rose" that more than anything else had made allegory fashionable. Plutarch tells us that an allegory is to say one thing where another is meant, and this might have been needful for the personal security of Jean de Meung, as afterwards for that of his successor, Rabelais. But, except as a means of evading the fagot, the method has few recommendations. It reverses the true office of poetry by making the real unreal. It is imagination endeavouring to recommend itself to the understanding by means of cuts. If an author be in such deadly earnest, or if his imagination be of such creative vigour as to project real figures when it meant to cast only a shadow upon vapour; if the true spirit come, at once obsequious and terrible, when the conjuror has drawn his circle and gone through with his incantations merely to produce a proper frame of mind in his audience, as was the case with Dante, there is no longer any question of allegory as the word and thing are commonly understood. But with all secondary poets, as with Spenser for example, the allegory does not become of one substance with the poetry, but is a kind of carven frame for it, whose figures lose their meaning, as they cease to be contemporary. It was not a style that could have much attraction for a nature so sensitive to the actual, so observant of it, so interested by it as that of Chaucer. He seems to have tried his hand at all the forms in vogue, and to have arrived in his old age at

the truth, essential to all really great poetry, that his own instincts were his safest guides, that there is nothing deeper in life than life itself, and that to conjure an allegorical significance into it was to lose sight of its real meaning. He of all men could not say one thing and mean another, unless by way of humorous contrast.

In thus turning frankly and gaily to the actual world, and drinking inspiration from sources open to all; in turning away from a colourless abstraction to the solid earth and to emotions common to every pulse; in discovering that to make the best of nature, and not to grope vaguely after something better than nature, was the true office of Art; in insisting on a definite purpose, on veracity, cheerfulness, and simplicity, Chaucer shows himself the true father and founder of what is characteristically *English* literature. He has a hatred of cant as hearty as Dr. Johnson's, though he has a slyer way of showing it; he has the placid common-sense of Franklin, the sweet, grave humour of Addison, the exquisite taste of Gray; but the whole texture of his mind, though its substance seem plain and grave, shows itself at every turn iridescent with poetic feeling like shot silk. Above all, he has an eye for character that seems to have caught at once not only its mental and physical features, but even its expression in variety of costume—an eye, indeed, second only, if it should be called second in some respects, to that of Shakespeare.

I know of nothing that may be compared with the prologue to the "Canterbury Tales," and with that to the story of the "Chanon's Yeoman," before Chaucer. Characters and portraits from real life had never been drawn with such discrimination, or with such variety, never with such bold precision of outline, and with such a lively sense of the picturesque. His Parson is still unmatched, though Dryden and Goldsmith have both tried their hands in emulation of him. And the humour also in its suavity, its perpetual presence and its shy unobtrusiveness, is something wholly new in literature. For anything that deserves to be called like it in English we must wait for Henry Fielding.

Chaucer is the first great poet who has treated To-day as if it were as good as Yesterday, the first who held up a mirror to contemporary life in its infinite variety of high and low, of humour and pathos. But he reflected life in its large sense as the life of *men*, from the knight to the ploughman—the life of every day as it is made up of that curious compound of human nature with manners. The very form of the "Canterbury Tales" was imaginative. The garden of Boccaccio, the supper-party of Grazzini, and the voyage of Giraldi make a good enough thread for their stories, but exclude all save equals and friends, exclude consequently human nature in its wider meaning. But by choosing a pilgrimage, Chaucer puts us on a plane where all men are equal, with souls to be saved, and with another world in view that abolishes all distinctions. By this choice, and by making the Host of the Tabard always the central figure, he has happily united the two most familiar emblems of life—the short journey and the inn. We find more and more as we study him that he rises quietly from the conventional to the universal, and may fairly take his place with Homer in virtue of the breadth of his humanity.

In spite of some external stains, which those who have studied the influence of manners will easily account for without imputing them to any moral depravity, we feel that we can join the pure-minded Spenser in calling him "most sacred, happy spirit." If character may be divined from works, he was a good man, genial, sincere, hearty, temperate of mind, more wise, perhaps, for this world than the next, but thoroughly humane, and friendly with God and men. I know not how to sum up what we feel about him better than by saying (what would have pleased most one who was indifferent to fame) that we love him more even than we admire. We are sure that here was a true brother-man so kindly that in his "House of Fame," after naming the great poets, he throws in a pleasant word for the oaten pipes

> "Of the little herd-grooms
> That keepen beasts among the brooms."

No better inscription can be written on the first page of his works than that which he places over the gate in his "Assembly of Fowls," and which contrasts so sweetly with the stern lines of Dante from which they were imitated :—

> "Through me men go into the blissful place
> Of the heart's heal and deadly woundës' cure ;
> Through me men go unto the well of Grace,
> Where green and lusty May doth ever endure,
> This is the way to all good aventure ;
> Be glad, thou Reader, and thy sorrow offcast,
> All open am I, pass in, and speed thee fast !"

---

## *DRYDEN.**

Benvenuto Cellini tells us that when, in his boyhood, he saw a salamander come out of the fire, his grandfather forthwith gave him a sound beating, that he might the better remember so unique a prodigy. Though perhaps in this case the rod had another application than the autobiographer chooses to disclose, and was intended to fix in the pupil's mind a lesson of veracity rather than of science, the testimony to its mnemonic virtue remains. Nay, so universally was it once believed that the senses, and through them the faculties of observation and retention, were quickened by an irritation of the cuticle, that in France it was customary to whip the children annually at the boundaries of the parish, lest the true place of them

* The Dramatick Works of John Dryden, Esq. In six volumes. London : Printed for Jacob Tonson, in the Strand. MDCCXXXV. 18mo.

The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden, now first collected. With Notes and Illustrations. An account of the Life and Writings of the Author, grounded on Original and Authentick Documents ; and a Collection of his Letters, the greatest Part of which has never before been published. By Edmund Malone, Esq. London : T. Cadell and W. Davies, in the Strand. 4 vols. 8vo.

The Poetical Works of John Dryden. (Edited by Mitford.) London : W. Pickering. 1832. 5 vols. 18mo.

might ever be lost through neglect of so inexpensive a mordant for the memory. From this practice the older school of critics would seem to have taken a hint for keeping fixed the limits of good taste, and what was somewhat vaguely called *classical* English. To mark these limits in poetry, they set up as Hermæ the images they had made to them of Dryden, of Pope, and later of Goldsmith. Here they solemnly castigated every new aspirant in verse, who in turn performed the same function for the next generation, thus helping to keep always sacred and immovable the *ne plus ultra* alike of inspiration and the vocabulary. Though no two natures were ever much more unlike than those of Dryden and Pope, and again of Pope and Goldsmith, and no two styles, except in such externals as could be easily caught and copied, yet it was the fashion, down even to the last generation, to advise young writers to form themselves, as it was called, on these excellent models. Wordsworth himself began in this school; and though there were glimpses, here and there, of a direct study of nature, yet most of the epithets in his earlier pieces were of the traditional kind so fatal to poetry during great part of the last century; and he indulged in that alphabetic personification which enlivens all such words as Hunger, Solitude, Freedom, by the easy magic of an initial capital.

> "Where the green apple shrivels on the spray,
> And pines the unripened pear in summer's kindliest ray,
> Even here Content has fixed her smiling reign
> With Independence, child of high Disdain.
> Exulting 'mid the winter of the skies,
> Shy as the jealous chamois, Freedom flies,
> And often grasps her sword, and often eyes."

Here we have every characteristic of the artificial method, even to the triplet, which Swift hated so heartily as "a vicious way of rhyming wherewith Mr. Dryden abounded, imitated by all the bad versifiers of Charles the Second's reign." Wordsworth became, indeed, very early the leader of reform; but, like Wesley, he endeavoured a reform within the Establishment. Purifying the substance, he retained

the outward forms with a feeling rather than conviction that, in poetry, substance and form are but manifestations of the same inward life, the one fused into the other in the vivid heat of their common expression. Wordsworth could never wholly shake off the influence of the century into which he was born. He began by proposing a reform of the ritual, but it went no further than an attempt to get rid of the words of Latin original where the meaning was as well or better given in derivatives of the Saxon. He would have stricken out the "assemble" and left the "meet together." Like Wesley, he might be compelled by necessity to a breach of the canon; but, like him, he was never a willing schismatic, and his singing robes were the full and flowing canonicals of the church by law established. Inspiration makes short work with the usage of the best authors and ready-made elegances of diction; but where Wordsworth is not possessed by his demon, as Molière said of Corneille, he equals Thomson in verbiage, out-Miltons Milton in artifice of style, and Latinises his diction beyond Dryden. The fact was, that he took up his early opinions on instinct, and insensibly modified them as he studied the masters of what may be called the Middle Period of English verse.* As a young man, he disparaged Virgil ("We talked a great deal of nonsense in those days," he said when taken to task for it later in life); at fifty-nine he translated three books of the Æneid, in emulation of Dryden, though falling far short of him in everything but closeness, as he seems, after a few years, to have been convinced. Keats was the first resolute and wilful heretic, the true founder of the modern school, which admit no cis-Elizabethan authority save Milton, whose own English was formed upon those earlier models. Keats denounced the authors of that style which came in toward the close of the seventeenth century, and reigned absolute through the whole of the eighteenth, as

* His "Character of a Happy Warrior" (1806), one of his noblest poems, has a dash of Dryden in it,—still more his "Epistle to Sir George Beaumont" (1811).

> "A schism,
> Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,
> . . . who went about
> Holding a poor decrepit standard out,
> Marked with most flimsy mottoes, and in large
> The name of one Boileau!"

But Keats had never then* studied the writers of whom he speaks so contemptuously, though he might have profited by so doing. Boileau would at least have taught him that *flimsy* would have been an apter epithet for the *standard* than for the mottoes upon it. Dryden was the author of that schism against which Keats so vehemently asserts the claim of the orthodox teaching it had displaced. He was far more just to Boileau, of whom Keats had probably never read a word. "If I would only cross the seas," he says, "I might find in France a living Horace and a Juvenal in the person of the admirable Boileau, whose numbers are excellent, whose expressions are noble, whose thoughts are just, whose language is pure, whose satire is pointed, and whose sense is just. What he borrows from the ancients he repays with usury of his own, in coin as good and almost as universally valuable."†

Dryden has now been in his grave nearly a hundred and seventy years; in the second class of English poets perhaps no one stands, on the whole, so high as he; during his lifetime, in spite of jealousy, detraction, unpopular politics, and a suspicious change of faith, his pre-eminence was conceded; he was the earliest complete type of the purely literary man, in the modern sense; there is a singular unanimity in allowing him a certain claim to *greatness* which would be denied to men as famous and more read,—to Pope or Swift, for example; he is supposed, in some way or other, to have reformed English poetry. It is now about half a century since the only uniform edition of his works was edited by Scott. No library is complete without him,

* He studied Dryden's versification before writing his "Lamia."

† On the Origin and Progress of Satire. See Johnson's counter opinion in his life of Dryden.

no name is more familiar than his, and yet it may be suspected that few writers are more thoroughly buried in that great cemetery of the "British Poets." If contemporary reputation be often deceitful, posthumous fame may be generally trusted, for it is a verdict made up of the suffrages of the select men in succeeding generations. This verdict has been as good as unanimous in favour of Dryden. It is, perhaps, worth while to take a fresh observation of him, to consider him neither as warning nor example, but to endeavour to make out what it is that has given so lofty and firm a position to one of the most unequal, inconsistent, and faulty writers that ever lived. He is a curious example of what we often remark of the living, but rarely of the dead,—that they get credit for what they might be quite as much as for what they are,—and posterity has applied to him one of his own rules of criticism, judging him by the best rather than the average of his achievement, a thing posterity is seldom wont to do. On the losing side in politics, it is true of his polemical writings as of Burke's, —whom in many respects he resembles, and especially in that supreme quality of a reasoner, that his mind gathers not only heat, but clearness and expansion by its own motion,—that they have won his battle for him in the judgment of after times.

To us, looking back at him, he gradually becomes a singularly interesting and even picturesque figure. He is in more senses than one, in language, in turn of thought, in style of mind, in the direction of his activity, the first of the moderns. He is the first literary man who was also a man of the world, as we understand the term. He succeeded Ben Jonson as the acknowledged dictator of wit and criticism, as Dr. Johnson, after nearly the same interval, succeeded him. All ages are, in some sense, ages of transition; but there are times when the transition is more marked, more rapid; and it is, perhaps, an ill fortune for a man of letters to arrive at maturity during such a period, still more to represent in himself the change that is going on, and to be an efficient cause in bringing it about.

Unless, like Goethe, he is of a singularly uncontemporaneous nature, capable of being *tutta in se romita*, and of running parallel with his time rather than be sucked into its current, he will be thwarted into that harmonious development of native force which has so much to do with its steady and successful application. Dryden suffered, no doubt, in this way. Though in creed he seems to have drifted backward in an eddy of the general current; yet of the intellectual movement of the time, so far certainly as literature shared in it, he could say, with Æneas, not only that he saw, but that himself was a great part of it. That movement was, on the whole, a downward one, from faith to scepticism, from enthusiasm to cynicism, from the imagination to the understanding. It was in a direction altogether away from those springs of imagination and faith at which they of the last age had slaked the thirst or renewed the vigour of their souls. Dryden himself recognised that indefinable and gregarious influence which we call nowadays the Spirit of the Age, when he said that "every Age has a kind of universal Genius."* He had also a just notion of that in which he lived; for he remarks, incidentally, that "all knowing ages are naturally sceptic and not at all bigoted, which, if I am not much deceived, is the proper character of our own."† It may be conceived that he was even painfully half-aware of having fallen upon a time incapable, not merely of a great poet, but perhaps of any poet at all; for nothing is so sensitive to the chill of a sceptical atmosphere as that enthusiasm, which, if it be not genius, is at least the beautiful illusion that saves it from the baffling quibbles of self-consciousness. Thrice unhappy he who, born to see things as they might be, is schooled by circumstances to see them as people say they are,—to read God in a prose translation. Such was Dryden's lot, and such, for a good part of his days, it was by his own choice. He who was of a stature to snatch the torch of life that flashes from lifted hand to hand along the generations, over the heads of inferior men, chose rather to be a link-boy to the stews.

* Essay on Dramatick Poesy. † Life of Lucian.

As a writer for the stage, he deliberately adopted and repeatedly reaffirmed the maxim that

"He who lives to please, must please to live."

Without earnest convictions, no great or sound literature is conceivable. But if Dryden mostly wanted that inspiration which comes of belief in and devotion to something nobler and more abiding than the present moment and its petulant need, he had, at least, the next best thing to that, —a thorough faith in himself. He was, moreover, a man of singularly open soul, and of a temper self-confident enough to be candid even with himself. His mind was growing to the last, his judgment widening and deepening, his artistic sense refining itself more and more. He confessed his errors, and was not ashamed to retrace his steps in search of that better knowledge which the omniscience of superficial study had disparaged. Surely an intellect that is still pliable at seventy is a phenomenon as interesting as it is rare. But at whatever period of his life we look at Dryden, and whatever, for the moment, may have been his poetic creed, there was something in the nature of the man that would not be wholly subdued to what it worked in. There are continual glimpses of something in him greater than he, hints of possibilities finer than anything he has done. You feel that the whole of him was better than any random specimens, though of his best, seem to prove. *Incessu patet*, he has by times the large stride of the elder race, though it sinks too often into the slouch of a man who has seen better days. His grand air may, in part, spring from a habit of easy superiority to his competitors; but must also, in part, be ascribed to an innate dignity of character. That this pre-eminence should have been so generally admitted, during his life, can only be explained by a bottom of good sense, kindliness, and sound judgment, whose solid worth could afford that many a flurry of vanity, petulance, and even error should flit across the surface and be forgotten. Whatever else Dryden may have been, the last and abiding impression of

him is, that he was thoroughly manly; and while it may be disputed whether he was a great poet, it may be said of him, as Wordsworth said of Burke, that "he was by far the greatest man of his age, not only abounding in knowledge himself, but feeding, in various directions, his most able contemporaries."*

Dryden was born in 1631. He was accordingly six years old when Jonson died, was neary a quarter of a century younger than Milton, and may have personally known Bishop Hall, the first English satirist, who was living till 1656. On the other side, he was older than Swift by thirty-six, than Addison by forty-one, and than Pope by fifty-seven years. Dennis says that "Dryden, for the last ten years of his life, was much acquainted with Addison, and drank with him more than he ever used to do, probably so far as to hasten his end," being commonly "an extreme sober man." Pope tells us that, in his twelfth year, he "saw Dryden," perhaps at Will's, perhaps in the street, as Scott did Burns. Dryden himself visited Milton now and then, and was intimate with Davenant, who could tell him of Fletcher and Jonson from personal recollection. Thus he stands between the age before and that which followed him, giving a hand to each. His father was a country clergyman, of Puritan leanings, a younger son of an ancient county family. The Puritanism is thought to have come in with the poet's great-grandfather, who made in his will the somewhat singular statement that he was "assured by the Holy Ghost that he was elect of God." It would appear from this that Dryden's self-confidence was an inheritance. The solid quality of his mind showed itself early. He himself tells us that he had read Polybius "in English, with the pleasure of a boy, before he was ten years of age, and yet even then *had some dark notions of the prudence with which he conducted his design.*"† The concluding words are very characteristic, even if Dryden, as

* "The great man must have that intellect which puts in motion the intellect of others."—LANDOR, *Im. Con.*, Diogenes and Plato.

† Character of Polybius (1692).

men commonly do, interpreted his boyish turn of mind by later self-knowledge. We thus get a glimpse of him browsing—for, like Johnson, Burke, and the full as distinguished from the learned men, he was always a random reader*—in his father's library, and painfully culling here and there a spray of his own proper nutriment from among the stubs and thorns of Puritan divinity. After such schooling as could be had in the country, he was sent up to Westminster School, then under the headship of the celebrated Dr. Busby. Here he made his first essays in verse, translating, among other school exercises of the same kind, the third satire of Persius. In 1650 he was entered at Trinity College, Cambridge, and remained there for seven years. The only record of his college life is a discipline imposed, in 1652, for "disobedience to the Vice-Master, and contumacy in taking his punishment, inflicted by him." Whether this punishment was corporeal, as Johnson insinuates in the similar case of Milton, we are ignorant. He certainly retained no very fond recollection of his Alma Mater, for in his "Prologue to the University of Oxford" he says:—

> "Oxford to him a dearer name shall be
> Than his own mother university;
> Thebes did his green, unknowing youth engage,
> He chooses Athens in his riper age."

By the death of his father, in 1654, he came into possession of a small estate of sixty pounds a-year, from which, however, a third must be deducted, for his mother's dower, till 1676. After leaving Cambridge he became secretary to his near relative, Sir Gilbert Pickering, at that time Cromwell's chamberlain, and a member of his Upper House. In 1670 he succeeded Davenant as Poet Laureate,† and Howell as Historiographer, with a yearly salary of two hundred pounds.

* "For my own part, who must confess it to my shame that I never read anything but for pleasure."—Life of Plutarch (1683).

† Gray says petulantly enough that "Dryden was as disgraceful to the office, from his character, as the poorest scribbler could have been from his verses."—GRAY to MASON, 19th December, 1757.

This place he lost at the Revolution, and had the mortification to see his old enemy and butt, Shadwell, promoted to it, as the best poet the Whig party could muster. If William was obliged to read the verses of his official minstrel, Dryden was more than avenged. From 1688 to his death, twelve years later, he earned his bread manfully by his pen, without any mean complaining, and with no allusion to his fallen fortunes that is not dignified and touching. These latter years, during which he was his own man again, were probably the happiest of his life. In 1664 or 1665 he married Lady Elizabeth Howard, daughter of the Earl of Berkshire. About a hundred pounds a-year were thus added to his income. The marriage is said not to have been a happy one, and perhaps it was not, for his wife was apparently a weak-minded woman; but the inference from the internal evidence of Dryden's plays, as of Shakespeare's, is very untrustworthy, ridicule of marriage having always been a common stock in trade of the comic writers.

The earliest of his verses that have come down to us were written upon the death of Lord Hastings, and are as bad as they can be,—a kind of parody on the worst of Donne. They have every fault of his manner, without a hint of the subtile and often profound thought that more than redeems it. As the Doctor himself would have said, here is Donne outdone. The young nobleman died of the small-pox, and Dryden exclaims pathetically,—

> "Was there no milder way than the small-pox,
> The very filthiness of Pandora's box?"

He compares the pustules to "rosebuds stuck i' the lily skin about," and says that

> "Each little pimple had a tear in it
> To wail the fault its rising did commit."

But he has not done his worst yet, by a great deal. What follows is even finer:—

> "No comet need foretell his change drew on,
> Whose corpse might seem a constellation.

O, had he died of old, how great a strife
Had been who from his death should draw their life!
Who should, by one rich draught, become whate'er
Seneca, Cato, Numa, Cæsar, were,
Learned, virtuous, pious, great, and have by this
An universal metempsychosis!
Must all these aged sires in one funeral
Expire? all die in one so young, so small?"

It is said that one of Allston's early pictures was brought to him, after he had long forgotten it, and his opinion asked as to the wisdom of the young artist's persevering in the career he had chosen. Allston advised his quitting it forthwith as hopeless. Could the same experiment have been tried with these verses upon Dryden, can any one doubt that his counsel would have been the same? It should be remembered, however, that he was barely turned eighteen when they were written, and the tendency of his style is noticeable in so early an abandonment of the participial *ed* in *learned* and *aged*. In the next year he appears again in some commendatory verses prefixed to the sacred epigrams of his friend, John Hoddesdon. In these he speaks of the author as a

"Young eaglet, who, thy nest thus soon forsook,
So lofty and divine a course hast took
As all admire, before the down begin
To peep, as yet, upon thy smoother chin."

Here is almost every fault which Dryden's later nicety would have condemned. But perhaps there is no schooling so good for an author as his own youthful indiscretions. After this effort Dryden seems to have lain fallow for ten years, and then he at length reappears in thirty-seven "heroic stanzas" on the death of Cromwell. The versification is smoother, but the conceits are there again, though in a milder form. The verse is modelled after "Gondibert." A single image from nature (he was almost always happy in these) gives some hint of the maturer Dryden:—

"And wars, like mists that rise against the sun,
Made him but greater seem, not greater grow."

Two other verses,

> "And the isle, when her protecting genius went,
> Upon his obsequies loud sighs conferred,"

are interesting, because they show that he had been studying the early poems of Milton. He has contrived to bury under a rubbish of verbiage one of the most purely imaginative passages ever written by the great Puritan poet.

> "From haunted spring and dale,
> Edged with poplar pale,
> The parting genius is with sighing sent."

This is the more curious because, twenty-four years afterwards, he says, in defending rhyme: "Whatever causes he [Milton] alleges for the abolishment of rhyme, his own particular reason is plainly this, that rhyme was not his talent; he had neither the ease of doing it nor the graces of it: which is manifest in his *Juvenilia*, . . . where his rhyme is always constrained and forced, and comes hardly from him, at the age when the soul is most pliant, and the passion of love makes almost every man a rhymer, though not a poet."* It was this, no doubt, that heartened Dr. Johnson to say of "Lycidas" that "the diction was harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing." It is Dryden's excuse that his characteristic excellence is to argue persuasively and powerfully, whether in verse or prose, and that he was amply endowed with the most needful quality of an advocate,—to be always strongly and wholly of his present way of thinking, whatever it might be. Next we have, in 1660, "Astræa Redux" on the "happy restoration" of Charles II. In this also we can forebode little of the full-grown Dryden but his defects. We see his tendency to exaggeration, and to confound physical with metaphysical, as where he says of the ships that brought home the royal brothers, that

> "The joyful London meets
> The princely York, himself alone a freight,
> The Swiftsure groans beneath great Gloster's weight

* Essay on the Origin and Progress of Satire.

and speaks of the

> "Repeated prayer
> Which stormed the skies and ravished Charles from thence."

There is also a certain everydayness, not to say vulgarity, of phrase, which Dryden never wholly refined away, and which continually tempts us to sum up at once against him as the greatest poet that ever was or could be made wholly out of prose.

> "Heaven would no bargain for its blessings drive"

is an example. On the other hand, there are a few verses almost worthy of his best days, as these :—

> "Some lazy ages lost in sleep and ease,
> No action leave to busy chronicles;
> Such whose *supine felicity* but makes
> In story chasms, in epochas mistakes,
> O'er whom Time gently shakes his wings of down,
> Till with his silent sickle they are mown."

These are all the more noteworthy, that Dryden, unless in argument, is seldom equal for six lines together. In the poem to Lord Clarendon (1662) there are four verses that have something of the "energy divine" for which Pope praised his master.

> "Let envy, then, those crimes within you see
> From which the happy never must be free;
> Envy that does with misery reside,
> The joy and the revenge of ruined pride."

In his "Aurengzebe" (1675) there is a passage, of which, as it is a good example of Dryden, I shall quote the whole, though my purpose aims mainly at the latter verses :—

> "When I consider life, 't is all a cheat;
> Yet, fooled with Hope, men favour the deceit,
> Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay;
> To-morrow 's falser than the former day,
> Lies worse, and, while it says we shall be blest
> With some new joys, cuts off what we possest.

> Strange cozenage! none would live past years again,
> Yet all hope pleasure in what yet remain,
> And from the dregs of life think to receive
> What the first sprightly running could not give.
> I 'm tired of waiting for this chymic gold
> Which fools us young and beggars us when old."

The "first sprightly running" of Dryden's vintage was, it must be confessed, a little muddy, if not beery; but if his own soil did not produce grapes of the choicest flavour, he knew where they were to be had; and his product, like sound wine, grew better the longer it stood upon the lees. He tells us, evidently thinking of himself, that in a poet, "from fifty to threescore, the balance generally holds, even in our colder climates, for he loses not much in fancy; and judgment, which is the effect of observation, still increases. His succeeding years afford him little more than the stubble of his own harvest, yet, if his constitution be healthful, his mind may still retain a decent vigour, and the gleanings of that of Ephraim, in comparison with others, will surpass the vintage of Abiezer."* Since Chaucer, none of our poets has had a constitution more healthful, and it was his old age that yielded the best of him. In him the understanding was, perhaps, in overplus for his entire good fortune as a poet, and that is a faculty among the earliest to mature. We have seen him, at only ten years, divining the power of reason in Polybius.† The same turn of mind led him later to imitate the French school of tragedy, and to admire in Ben Jonson the most correct of English poets. It was his imagination that needed quickening, and it is very curious to trace through his different prefaces the gradual opening of his eyes to the causes of the solitary pre-eminence of Shakespeare. At first he is sensible of an attraction towards him which he cannot explain, and for which he apologises, as if it were wrong. But he feels himself drawn more and more strongly, till at

* Dedication of the Georgics.

† Dryden's penetration is always remarkable. His general judgment of Polybius coincides remarkably with that of Mommsen. (Röm. Gesch. II. 448, *seq.*)

last he ceases to resist altogether, and is forced to acknowledge that there is something in this one man that is not and never was anywhere else, something not to be reasoned about, ineffable, divine; if contrary to the rules, so much the worse for *them*. It may be conjectured that Dryden's Puritan associations may have stood in the way of his more properly poetic culture, and that his early knowledge of Shakespeare was slight. He tells us that Davenant, whom he could not have known before he himself was twenty-seven, first taught him to admire the great poet. But even after his imagination had become conscious of its prerogative, and his expression had been ennobled by frequenting this higher society, we find him continually dropping back into that *sermo pedestris* which seems, on the whole, to have been his more natural element. We always feel his epoch in him, that he was the lock which let our language down from its point of highest poetry to its level of easiest and most gently flowing prose. His enthusiasm needs the contagion of other minds to arouse it; but his strong sense, his command of the happy word, his wit, which is distinguished by a certain breadth and, as it were, power of generalisation, as Pope's by keenness of edge and point, were his, whether he would or no. Accordingly, his poetry is often best and his verse more flowing where (as in parts of his version of the twenty-ninth ode of the third book of Horace) he is amplifying the suggestions of another mind.* Viewed from one side, he justifies Milton's remark of him, that "he was a good rhymist, but no poet." To look at all sides, and to distrust the verdict of a single mood, is, no doubt, the duty of a critic. But how if a certain side be so often presented as to thrust forward in the memory and disturb it in the effort to recall that total impression (for the office of a critic is not, though often so misunderstood, to say *guilty* or *not guilty* of some particular

* "I have taken some pains to make it my masterpiece in English." Preface to Second Miscellany. Fox said that it "was better than the original." J. C. Scaliger said of Erasmus—"Ex alieno ingenio poeta, ex suo versificator."

fact) which is the only safe ground of judgment? It is the weight of the whole man, not of one or the other limb of him, that we want. *Expende Hannibalem.* Very good, but not in a scale capacious only of a single quality at a time, for it is their union, and not their addition, that assures the value of each separately. It was not this or that which gave him his weight in council, his swiftness of decision in battle that outran the forethought of other men, —it was Hannibal. But this prosaic element in Dryden will force itself upon me. As I read him, I cannot help thinking of an ostrich, to be classed with flying things, and capable, what with leap and flap together, of leaving the earth for a longer or shorter space, but loving the open plain, where wing and foot help each other to something that is both flight and run at once. What with his haste and a certain dash, which, according to our mood, we may call florid or splendid, he seems to stand among poets where Rubens does among painters,—greater, perhaps, as a colourist than an artist, yet great here also, if we compare him with any but the first.

We have arrived at Dryden's thirty-second year, and thus far have found little in him to warrant an augury that he was ever to be one of the *great* names in English literature, the most perfect type, that is, of his class, and that class a high one, though not the highest. If Joseph de Maistre's axiom, *Qui n'a pas vaincu à trente ans, ne vaincra jamais*, were true, there would be little hope of him, for he has won no battle yet. But there is something solid and doughty in the man, that can rise from defeat, the stuff of which victories are made in due time, when we are able to choose our position better, and the sun is at our back. Hitherto his performances have been mainly of the *obligato* sort, at which few men of original force are good, least of all Dryden, who had always something of stiffness in his strength. Waller had praised the living Cromwell in perhaps the manliest verses he ever wrote,—not *very* manly, to be sure, but really elegant, and, on the whole, better than those in which Dryden squeezed out melodious tears

Waller, who had also made himself conspicuous as a volunteer Antony to the country squire turned Cæsar,

> ("With ermine clad and purple, let him hold
> A royal sceptre made of Spanish gold,")

was more servile than Dryden in hailing the return of *ex officio* Majesty. He bewails to Charles, in snuffling heroics,

> "Our sorrow and our crime
> To have accepted life so long a time,
> Without you here."

A weak man, put to the test by rough and angry times, as Waller was, may be pitied, but meanness is nothing but contemptible under any circumstances. If it be true that "every conqueror creates a Muse," Cromwell was unfortunate. Even Milton's sonnet, though dignified, is reserved if not distrustful. Marvell's "Horatian Ode," the most truly classic in our language, is worthy of its theme. The same poet's Elegy, in parts noble, and everywhere humanly tender, is worth more than all Carlyle's biography as a witness to the gentler qualities of the hero, and of the deep affection that stalwart nature could inspire in hearts of truly masculine temper. As it is little known, a few verses of it may be quoted to show the difference between grief that thinks of its object and grief that thinks of its rhymes :—

> "Valour, religion, friendship, prudence died
> At once with him, and all that's good beside,
> And we, death's refuse, nature's dregs, confined
> To loathsome life, alas! are left behind.
> Where we (so once we used) shall now no more,
> To fetch day, press about his chamber-door,
> No more shall hear that powerful language charm,
> Whose force oft spared the labour of his arm,
> No more shall follow where he spent the days
> In war or counsel, or in prayer and praise.
>
> . . . . .
>
> I saw him dead; a leaden slumber lies,
> And mortal sleep, over those wakeful eyes;

Those gentle rays under the lids were fled,
Which through his looks that piercing sweetness shed ;
That port, which so majestic was and strong,
Loose and deprived of vigour, stretched along,
All withered, all discoloured, pale, and wan,
How much another thing ! no more That Man !
O human glory ! vain ! O death ! O wings !
O worthless world ! O transitory things !
Yet dwelt that greatness in his shape decayed
That still, though dead, greater than Death he laid,
And, in his altered face, you something feign
That threatens Death he yet will live again."

Such verses might not satisfy Lindley Murray, but they are of that higher mood which satisfies the heart. These couplets, too, have an energy worthy of Milton's friend :—

"When up the armëd mountains of Dunbar
He marched, and through deep Severn, ending war."

"Thee, many ages hence, in martial verse
Shall the English soldier, ere he charge, rehearse."

On the whole, one is glad that Dryden's panegyric on the Protector was so poor. It was purely official verse-making. Had there been any feeling in it, there had been baseness in his address to Charles. As it is, we may fairly assume that he was so far sincere in both cases as to be thankful for a chance to exercise himself in rhyme, without much caring whether upon a funeral or a restoration. He might naturally enough expect that poetry would have a better chance under Charles than under Cromwell, or any successor with Commonwealth principles. Cromwell had more serious matters to think about than verses, while Charles might at least care as much about them as it was in his base good-nature to care about anything but loose women and spaniels. Dryden's sound sense, afterwards so conspicuous, shows itself even in these pieces, when we can get at it through the tangled thicket of tropical phrase. But the authentic and unmistakable Dryden first manifests himself in some verses addressed to his friend, Dr. Charlton, in 1663. We have first his common sense, which has almost the point of wit, yet with a tang of prose :—

> "The longest tyranny that ever swayed
> Was that wherein our ancestors betrayed
> Their freeborn reason to the Stagyrite,
> And made his torch their universal light.
> *So truth, while only one supplied the state,*
> *Grew scarce and dear and yet sophisticate.*
> *Still it was bought, like emp'ric wares or charms,*
> *Hard words sealed up with Aristotle's arms.*"

Then we have his graceful sweetness of fancy, where he speaks of the inhabitants of the New World:—

> "Guiltless men who danced away their time,
> Fresh as their groves and happy as their clime."

And, finally, there is a hint of imagination where "mighty visions of the Danish race" watch round Charles sheltered in Stonehenge after the battle of Worcester. These passages might have been written by the Dryden whom we learn to know fifteen years later. They have the advantage that he wrote them to please himself. His contemporary, Dr. Heylin, said of French cooks, that "their trade was not to feed the belly, but the palate." Dryden was a great while in learning this secret, as available in good writing as in cookery. He strove after it, but his thorougly English nature, to the last, would too easily content itself with serving up the honest beef of his thought, without regard to daintiness of flavour in the dressing of it.* Of the best English poetry, it might be said that it is understanding aërated by imagination. In Dryden the solid part too often refused to mix kindly with the leaven, either remaining lumpish or rising to a hasty puffiness. Grace and lightness were with him much more a laborious achievement than a

* In one of the last letters he ever wrote, thanking his cousin, Mrs. Steward, for a gift of marrow-puddings, he says: "A chine of honest bacon would please my appetite more than all the marrow-puddings; for I like them better plain, having a very vulgar stomach." So of Cowley he says: "There was plenty enough, but ill sorted, whole pyramids of sweetmeats for boys and women, but little of solid meat for men." The physical is a truer antitype of the spiritual man than we are willing to admit, and the brain is often forced to acknowledge the inconvenient country-cousinship of the stomach.

natural gift, and it is all the more remarkable that he should so often have attained to what seems such an easy perfection in both. Always a hasty writer,* he was long in forming his style, and to the last was apt to snatch the readiest word rather than wait for the fittest. He was not wholly and unconsciously poet, but a thinker who sometimes lost himself on enchanted ground and was transfigured by its touch. This preponderance in him of the reasoning over the intuitive faculties, the one always there, the other flashing in when you least expect it, accounts for that inequality and even incongruousness in his writing which makes one revise his judgment at every tenth page. In his prose you come upon passages that persuade you he is a poet, in spite of his verses so often turning state's evidence against him as to convince you he is none. He is a prose-writer, with a kind of Æolian attachment. For example, take this bit of prose from the dedication of his version of Virgil's Pastorals, 1694; "He found the strength of his genius betimes, and was even in his youth preluding to his Georgicks and his Æneis. He could not forbear to try his wings, though his pinions were not hardened to maintain a long, laborious flight; yet sometimes they bore him to a pitch as lofty as ever he was able to reach afterwards. But when he was admonished by his subject to descend, he came down gently circling in the air and singing to the ground, like a lark melodious in her mounting and continuing her song till she alights, still preparing for a higher flight at her next sally, and tuning her voice to better music." This is charming, and yet even this wants the ethereal tincture that pervades the style of Jeremy Taylor, making it, as Burke said of Sheridan's eloquence, "neither prose nor poetry, but something better than either." Let us

* In his preface to "All for Love," he says, evidently alluding to himself: "If he have a friend whose hastiness in writing is his greatest fault, Horace would have taught him to have minced the matter, and to have called it readiness of thought and a flowing fancy." And in the Preface to the Fables he says of Homer: "This vehemence of his, I confess, is more suitable to my temper." He makes other allusions to it.

compare Taylor's treatment of the same image: "For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass and soaring upwards, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven and climb above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back by the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest than it could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of his wings, till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over, and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing as if it had learned music and motion of an angel as he passed sometimes through the air about his ministries here below." Taylor's fault is that his sentences too often smell of the library, but what an open air is here! How unpremeditated it all seems! How carelessly he knots each new thought, as it comes, to the one before it with an *and*, like a girl making lace! And what a slidingly musical use he makes of the sibilants with which our language is unjustly taxed by those who can only make them hiss, not sing! There are twelve of them in the first twenty words, fifteen of which are monosyllables. We notice the structure of Dryden's periods, but this grows up as we read. It gushes, like the song of the bird itself,—

> "In profuse strains of unpremeditated art."

Let us now take a specimen of Dryden's bad prose from one of his poems. I open the "Annus Mirabilis" at random, and hit upon this:—

> "Our little fleet was now engaged so far,
> That, like the swordfish in the whale, they fought:
> The combat only seemed a civil war,
> Till through their bowels we our passage wrought."

Is this Dryden, or Sternhold, or Shadwell, those Toms who made him say that "dulness was fatal to the name of Tom?" The natural history of Goldsmith in the verse of

Pye! His thoughts did not "voluntary move harmonious numbers." He had his choice between prose and verse, and seems to be poetical on second thought. I do not speak without book. He was more than half conscious of it himself. In the same letter to Mrs. Steward, just cited, he says, "I am still drudging on, always a poet and never a good one;" and this from no mock-modesty, for he is always handsomely frank in telling us whatever of his own doing pleased him. This was written in the last year of his life, and at about the same time he says elsewhere: "What judgment I had increases rather than diminishes, and thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject, to run them into verse or to give them the other harmony of prose; I have so long studied and practised both, that they are grown into a habit and become familiar to me."* I think that a man who was primarily a poet would hardly have felt this equanimity of choice.

I find a confirmation of this feeling about Dryden in his early literary loves. His taste was not an instinct, but the slow result of reflection and of the manfulness with which he always acknowledged to himself his own mistakes. In this latter respect few men deal so magnanimously with themselves as he, and accordingly few have been so happily inconsistent. *Ancora imparo* might have served him for a motto as well as Michael Angelo. His prefaces are a complete log of his life, and the habit of writing them was a useful one to him, for it forced him to think with a pen in his hand, which, according to Goethe, "if it do no other good, keeps the mind from staggering about." In these prefaces we see his taste gradually rising from Du Bartas to Spenser, from Cowley to Milton, from Corneille to Shakespeare. "I remember when I was a boy," he says in his dedication of the "Spanish Friar," 1681, "I thought inimitable Spenser a mean poet in comparison of Sylvester's *Du Bartas*, and was rapt into an ecstacy when I read these lines:—

* Preface to the Fables.

'Now when the winter's keener breath began
To crystallise the Baltic oceän,
To glaze the lakes, to bridle up the floods,
And periwig with snow* the baldpate woods.'

I am much deceived if this be not abominable fustian." Swift, in his "Tale of a Tub," has a ludicrous passage in this style: "Look on this globe of earth, you will find it to be a very complete and fashionable dress. What is that which some call *land*, but a fine coat faced with green? or the *sea*, but a waistcoat of water-tabby? Proceed to the particular works of creation, you will find how curious journeyman Nature has been to trim up the vegetable *beaux;* observe how *sparkish a periwig adorns the head of a beech*, and what a fine doublet of white satin is worn by the birch." The fault is not in any inaptness of the images, nor in the mere vulgarity of the things themselves, but in that of the associations they awaken. The "Prithee, undo this button" of Lear, coming where it does and expressing what it does, is one of those touches of the pathetically sublime, of which only Shakespeare ever knew the secret. Herrick, too, has a charming poem on "Julia's petticoat," the charm being that he lifts the familiar and the low to the region of sentiment. In the passage from Sylvester, it is precisely the reverse, and the wig takes as much from the sentiment as it adds to a Lord Chancellor. So Pope's proverbial verse,

"True wit is Nature to advantage drest,"

unpleasantly suggests Nature under the hands of a lady's-maid.† We have no word in English that will exactly

* *Wool* is Sylvester's word. Dryden reminds us of Burke in this also, that he always quotes from memory and seldom exactly. His memory was better for things than for words. This helps to explain the length of time it took him to master that vocabulary at last so various, full, and seemingly extemporaneous. He is a large quoter, though, with his usual inconsistency, he says, "I am no admirer of quotations."—(Essay on Heroic Plays.)

† In the *Epimetheus* of a poet usually as elegant as Gray himself, one's finer sense is a little jarred by the

"Spectral gleam their snow-white *dresses*."

define this want of propriety in diction. *Vulgar* is too strong, and *commonplace* too weak. Perhaps *bourgeois* comes as near as any. It is to be noticed that Dryden does not unequivocally condemn the passage he quotes, but qualifies it with an "if I am not much mistaken." Indeed, though his judgment in substantials, like that of Johnson, is always worth having, his taste, the negative half of genius, never altogether refined itself from a colloquial familiarity, which is one of the charms of his prose, and gives that air of easy strength in which his satire is unmatched. In his "Royal Martyr" (1669), the tyrant Maximin says to the gods:—

> "Keep you your rain and sunshine in the skies,
> And I'll keep back my flame and sacrifice;
> *Your trade of Heaven shall soon be at a stand,*
> *And all your goods lie dead upon your hand,*"—

a passage which has as many faults as only Dryden was capable of committing, even to a false idiom forced by the last rhyme. The same tyrant in dying exclaims:—

> "And after thee I'll go,
> Revenging still, and following e'en to th' other world my blow,
> And, *shoving back this earth on which I sit,*
> *I'll mount and scatter all the gods I hit.*"

In the "Conquest of Grenada" (1670), we have:—

> "This little loss in our vast body shews
> So small, that half *have never heard the news;*
> *Fame's out of breath e'er she can fly so far*
> *To tell 'em all that you have e'er made war.*"*

* This probably suggested to Young the grandiose image in his "Last Day" (B. ii.):—

> "Those overwhelming armies . . .
> Whose rear lay wrapt in night, while breaking down
> Roused the broad front and called the battle on."

This, to be sure, is no plagiarism; but it should be carried to Dryden's credit that we catch the poets of the next half-century oftener with their hands in his pockets than in those of any one else.

And in the same play,

> "That busy thing,
> *The soul, is packing up*, and just on wing
> Like parting swallows when they seek the spring,"

where the last sweet verse curiously illustrates that inequality (poetry on a prose background) which so often puzzles us in Dryden. Infinitely worse is the speech of Almanzor to his mother's ghost :—

> "I'll rush into the covert of the night
> And pull thee backward by the shroud to light,
> Or else I'll squeeze thee like a bladder there,
> And make thee groan thyself away to air."

What wonder that Dryden should have been substituted for Davenant as the butt of the "Rehearsal," and that the parody should have had such a run? And yet it was Dryden who, in speaking of Persius, hit upon the happy phrase of "boisterous metaphors;"* it was Dryden who said of Cowley, whom he elsewhere calls "the darling of my youth,"† that he was "sunk in reputation because he could never forgive any conceit which came in his way, but swept, like a drag-net, great and small."‡ But the passages

* Essay on Satire. † Ibid.

‡ Preface to Fables. Men are always inclined to revenge themselves on their old idols in the first enthusiasm of conversion to a purer faith. Cowley had all the faults that Dryden loads him with, and yet his popularity was to some extent deserved. He at least had a theory that poetry should soar, not creep, and longed for some expedient, in the failure of natural wings, by which he could lift himself away from the conventional and commonplace. By beating out the substance of Pindar very thin, he contrived a kind of balloon, which, tumid with gas, did certainly mount a little, *into* the clouds, if not above them, though sure to come suddenly down with a bump. His odes, indeed, are an alternation of upward jerks and concussions, and smack more of Chapelain than of the Theban, but his prose is very agreeable,—Montaigne and water, perhaps, but with some flavour of the Gascon wine left. The strophe of his ode to Dr. Scarborough, in which he compares his surgical friend, operating for the stone, to Moses striking the rock, more than justifies all the ill that Dryden could lay at his door. It was into precisely such mud-holes that Cowley's Will-o'-the-Wisp had misguided him. Men may never wholly shake off a vice but they are always conscious of it, and hate the tempter.

I have thus far cited as specimens of our poet's coarseness (for poet he surely was *intus*, though not always *in cute*) were written before he was forty, and he had an odd notion, suitable to his healthy complexion, that poets on the whole improve after that date. Man at forty, he says, "seems to be fully in his summer tropic, . . . . and I believe that it will hold in all great poets that, though they wrote before with a certain heat of genius which inspired them, yet that heat was not perfectly digested." But artificial heat is never to be digested at all, as is plain in Dryden's case. He was a man who warmed slowly, and, in his hurry to supply the market, forced his mind. The result was the same after forty as before. In "Œdipus" (1679) we find,

> "Not one bolt
> Shall err from Thebes, but more be called for, more,
> *New-moulded thunder of a larger size!*"

This play was written in conjunction with Lee, of whom Dryden relates† that, when some one said to him, "It is easy enough to write like a madman," he replied, "No, it is hard to write like a madman, but easy enough to write like a fool,"—perhaps the most compendious lecture on poetry ever delivered. The splendid bit of eloquence, which has so much the sheet-iron clang of impeachment thunder (I hope that Dryden is not in the Library of Congress!) is perhaps Lee's. The following passage almost certainly is his:—

> "Sure 't is the end of all things! Fate has torn
> The lock of Time off, and his head is now
> The ghastly ball of round Eternity!"

But the next, in which the soul is likened to the pocket of an indignant housemaid charged with theft, is wholly in Dryden's manner:—

> "No; I dare challenge heaven to turn me outward,
> And shake my soul quite empty in your sight."

* Dedication of Georgics. † In a letter to Dennis, 1693.

In the same style, he makes his Don Sebastian (1690) say that he is as much astonished as "drowsy mortals" at the last trump,

> "When, called in haste, *they fumble for their limbs*,"

and propose to take upon himself the whole of a crime shared with another by asking Heaven *to charge the bill* on him. And in "King Arthur," written ten years after the Preface from which I have quoted his confession about Dubartas, we have a passage precisely of the kind he condemned :—

> "Ah for the many souls as but this morn
> Were clothed with flesh and warmed with vital blood,
> But naked now, or *shirted* but with air."

Dryden too often violated his own admirable rule, that "an author is not to write all he can, but only all he ought."* In his worst images, however, there is often a vividness that half excuses them. But it is a grotesque vividness, as from the flare of a bonfire. They do not flash into sudden lustre, as in the great poets, where the imaginations of poet and reader leap toward each other and meet half-way.

English prose is indebted to Dryden for having freed it from the cloister of pedantry. He, more than any other single writer, contributed, as well by precept as example, to give it suppleness of movement and the easier air of the modern world. His own style, juicy with proverbial phrases, has that familiar dignity, so hard to attain, perhaps unattainable except by one who, like Dryden, feels that his position is assured. Charles Cotton is as easy, but not so elegant; Walton as familiar, but not so flowing; Swift as idiomatic, but not so elevated; Burke more splendid, but not so equally luminous. That his style was no easy acquisition (though, of course, the aptitude was innate) he himself tells us. In his dedication of "Troilus and Cressida" (1679), where he seems to hint at the erection of an Academy, he

* Preface to Fables.

says that "the perfect knowledge of a tongue was never attained by any single person. The Court, the College, and the Town must all be joined in it. And as our English is a composition of the dead and living tongues, there is required a perfect knowledge, not only of the Greek and Latin, but of the Old German, French, and Italian, and to help all these, a conversation with those authors of our own who have written with the fewest faults in prose and verse. But how barbarously we yet write and speak your Lordship knows, and I am sufficiently sensible in my own English.* For I am often put to a stand in considering whether what I write be the idiom of the tongue, or false grammar and nonsense couched beneath that specious name of *Anglicism*, and have no other way to clear my doubts but by translating my English into Latin, and thereby trying what sense the words will bear in a more stable language." *Tantæ molis erat.* Five years later: "The proprieties and delicacies of the English are known to few; it is impossible even for a good wit to understand and practice them without the help of a liberal education, long reading and digesting of those few good authors we have amongst us, the knowledge of men and manners, *the freedom of habitudes and conversation with the best company of both sexes*, and, in short, without wearing off the rust which he contracted while he was laying in a stock of learning." In the passage I have italicised, it will be seen that Dryden lays some stress upon the influence of women in refining language. Swift, also, in his plan for an Academy, says: "Now, though I would by no means give the ladies the trouble of advising us in the reformation of our language, yet I cannot help thinking that, since they have been left out of all meetings except parties at play, or where worse designs are

* More than half a century later, Orrery, in his "Remarks" on Swift, says: "We speak and we write at random; and if a man's common conversation were committed to paper, he would be startled *for to* find himself guilty in *so few* sentences of so many solecisms and such false English." I do not remember *for to* anywhere in Dryden's prose. *So few* has long been denizened; no wonder, since it is nothing more than *si peu* Anglicised.

carried on, our conversation has very much degenerated."* Swift affirms that the language had grown corrupt since the Restoration, and that "the Court, which used to be the standard of propriety and correctness of speech, was then, and, I think, has ever since continued, the worst school in England."† He lays the blame partly on the general licentiousness, partly upon the French education of many of Charles's courtiers, and partly on the poets. Dryden undoubtedly formed his diction by the usage of the Court. The age was a very free-and-easy, not to say a very coarse one. Its coarseness was not external, like that of Elizabeth's day, but the outward mark of an inward depravity. What Swift's notion of the refinement of women was may be judged by his anecdotes of Stella. I will not say that Dryden's prose did not gain by the conversational elasticity which his frequenting men and women of the world enabled him to give it. It is the best specimen of every-day style that we have. But the habitual dwelling of his mind in a

* Letter to the Lord High Treasurer.

† Ibid. He complains of "manglings and abbreviations." "What does your Lordship think of the words drudg'd, disturb'd, rebuk'd, fledg'd, and a thousand others?" In a contribution to the "Tatler" (No. 230) he ridicules the use of *'um* for *them*, and a number of slang phrases, among which is *mob*. "The war," he says, "has introduced abundance of polysyllables, which will never be able to live many more campaigns." *Speculations, operations, preliminaries, ambassadors, pallisadoes, communication, circumvallation, battalions*, are the instances he gives, and all are now familiar. No man, or body of men, can dam the stream of language. Dryden is rather fond of *'em* for *them*, but uses it rarely in his prose. Swift himself prefers *'t is* to *it is*, as does Emerson still. In what Swift says of the poets, he may be fairly suspected of glancing at Dryden, who was his kinsman, and whose prefaces and translation of Virgil he ridicules in the "Tale of a Tub." Dryden is reported to have said of him, "Cousin Swift is no poet." The Dean began his literary career by Pindaric odes to Athenian Societies and the like,—perhaps the greatest mistake as to his own powers of which an author was ever guilty. It was very likely that he would send these to his relative, already distinguished, for his opinion upon them. If this was so, the justice of Dryden's judgment must have added to the smart. Swift never forgot or forgave; Dryden was careless enough to do the one, and large enough to do the other.

commonplace atmosphere, and among those easy levels of sentiment which befitted Will's Coffee-house and the Bird-cage Walk, was a damage to his poetry. Solitude is as needful to the imagination as society is wholesome for the character. He cannot always distinguish between enthusiasm and extravagance when he sees them. But apart from these influences which I have adduced in exculpation, there was certainly a vein of coarseness in him, a want of that exquisite sensitiveness which is the conscience of the artist. An old gentleman, writing to the Gentleman's Magazine in 1745, professes to remember "plain John Dryden (before he paid his court with success to the great) in one uniform clothing of Norwich drugget. I have eat tarts at the Mulberry Garden with him and Madam Reeve, when our author advanced to a sword and Chadreux wig."* I always fancy Dryden in the drugget, with wig, lace ruffles, and sword superimposed. It is the type of this curiously-incongruous man.

The first poem by which Dryden won a general acknowledgment of his power was the "Annus Mirabilis," written in his thirty-seventh year. Pepys, himself not altogether a bad judge, doubtless expresses the common opinion when he says—"I am very well pleased this night with reading a poem I brought home with me last night from Westminster Hall, of Dryden's, upon the present war; a very good

* Both Malone and Scott accept this gentleman's evidence without question, but I confess suspicion of a memory that runs back more than eighty-one years, and recollects a man before he had any claim to remembrance. Dryden was never poor, and there is at Oxford a portrait of him painted in 1664, which represents him in a superb periwig and laced band. This was "before he had paid his court with success to the great." But the story is at least *ben trovato*, and morally true enough to serve as an illustration. Who the "old gentleman" was has never been discovered. Of Crowne (who has some interest for us as a sometime student at Harvard) he says—"Many a cup of methegliu have I drank with little starch'd Johnny Crown; we called him so, from the stiff, unalterable primness of his long cravat." Crowne reflects no more credit on his Alma Mater than Downing. Both were sneaks, and of such a kind as, I think, can only be produced by a debauched Puritanism. Crowne, as a rival of Dryden, is contemptuously alluded to by Cibber in his "Apology."

poem."* And a very good poem, in some sort, it continues to be, in spite of its amazing blemishes. We must always bear in mind that Dryden lived in an age that supplied him with no ready-made inspiration, and that big phrases and images are apt to be pressed into the service when great ones do not volunteer. With this poem begins the long series of Dryden's prefaces, of which Swift made such excellent, though malicious, fun that I cannot forbear to quote it. "I do utterly disapprove and declare against that pernicious custom of making the *preface* a bill of fare to the book. For I have always looked upon it as a high point of indiscretion in monster-mongers and other retailers of strange sights to hang out a fair picture over the door, drawn after the life, with a most eloquent description underneath; this has saved me many a threepence. . . Such is exactly the fate at this time of *prefaces*. . . . This expedient was admirable at first; our great Dryden has long carried it as far as it would go, and with incredible success. He has often said to me in confidence, 'that the world would never have suspected him to be so great a poet, if he had not assured them so frequently, in his prefaces, that it was impossible they could either doubt or forget it.' Perhaps it may be so; however, I much fear his instructions have edified out of their place, and taught men to grow wiser in certain points where he never intended they should."† The *monster-mongers* is a terrible thrust, when we remember some of the comedies and heroic plays which Dryden ushered in this fashion. In the dedication of the "Annus" to the city of London is one of those pithy sentences of which Dryden is ever afterwards so full, and which he lets fall with a carelessness that seems always to deepen the meaning: "I have heard, indeed, of some virtuous persons who

* Diary, III. 390. Almost the only notices of Dryden that make him alive to me I have found in the delicious book of this Polonius-Montaigne, the only man who ever had the courage to keep a sincere journal, even under the shelter of cipher.

† Tale of a Tub, Sect. V. Pepys also speaks of buying the "Maiden Queen" of Mr. Dryden's, which he himself, in his preface, seems to brag of, and indeed is a good play.—18th January 1668.

have ended unfortunately, but never of any virtuous nation; Providence is engaged too deeply when the cause becomes so general." In his "account" of the poem in a letter to Sir Robert Howard he says: "I have chosen to write my poem in quatrains or stanzas of four in alternate rhyme, because I have ever judged them more noble and of greater dignity, both for the sound and number, than any other verse in use amongst us. . . . The learned languages have certainly a great advantage of us in not being tied to the slavery of any rhyme. . . . . But in this necessity of our rhymes, I have always found the couplet verse most easy, though not so proper for this occasion; for there the work is sooner at an end, every two lines concluding the labour of the poet." A little further on: "They (the French) write in alexandrines, or verses of six feet, such as amongst us is the old translation of Homer by Chapman: all which, by lengthening their chain,* makes the sphere of their activity the greater." I have quoted these passages because, in a small compass, they include several things characteristic of Dryden. "I have ever judged," and "I have always found," are particularly so. If he took up an opinion in the morning, he would have found so many arguments for it before night that it would seem already old and familiar. So with his reproach of rhyme; a year or two before he was eagerly defending it;† again a few years, and he will utterly condemn and

* He is fond of this image. In the "Maiden Queen" Celadon tells Sabina that, when he is with her rival Florimel, his heart is still her prisoner, "it only draws a longer chain after it." Goldsmith's fancy was taken by it; and everybody admires in the "Traveller" the extraordinary conceit of a heart dragging a lengthening chain. The smoothness of too many rhymed pentameters is that of thin ice over shallow water; so long as we glide along rapidly, all is well; but if we dwell a moment on any one spot, we may find ourselves knee-deep in mud. A later poet, in trying to improve on Goldsmith, shows the ludicrousness of the image:—

"And round my heart's leg ties its galling chain."

To write imaginatively a man should have—imagination!

† See his epistle dedicatory to the "Rival Ladies" (1664). For the other side, see particularly a passage in his "Discourse on Epic Poetry" (1697).

drop it in his plays, while retaining it in his translations; afterwards his study of Milton leads him to think that blank verse would suit the epic style better, and he proposes to try it with Homer, but at last translates one book as a specimen, and behold, it is in rhyme! But the charm of this great advocate is, that, whatever side he was on, he could always find excellent reasons for it, and state them with great force, and abundance of happy illustration. He is an exception to the proverb, and is none the worse pleader that he is always pleading his own cause. The blunder about Chapman is of a kind into which his hasty temperament often betrayed him. He remembered that Chapman's "Iliad" was in a long measure, concluded without looking that it was alexandrine, and then attributes it generally to his "Homer." Chapman's "Iliad" is done in fourteen-syllable verse, and his "Odyssee" in the very metre that Dryden himself used in his own version.* I remark also what he says of the couplet, that it was easy because the second verse concludes the labour of the poet. And yet it was Dryden who found it hard for that very reason. His vehement abundance refused those narrow banks, first running over into a triplet, and, even then uncontainable, rising to an alexandrine in the concluding verse. And I have little doubt that it was the roominess, rather than the dignity, of the quatrain which led him to choose it. As apposite to this, I may quote what he elsewhere says of octosyllablic verse: "The thought can turn itself with greater ease in a larger compass. When the rhyme comes too thick upon us, it straightens the expres-

* In the same way he had two years before assumed that Shakespeare "was the first who, to shun the pains of continued rhyming, invented that kind of writing which we call blank verse!" Dryden was never, I suspect, a very careful student of English literature. He seems never to have known that Surrey translated a part of the "Æneid" (and with great spirit) into blank verse. Indeed, he was not a scholar, in the proper sense of the word, but he had that faculty of rapid assimilation without study, so remarkable in Coleridge and other rich minds, whose office is rather to impregnate than to invent. These brokers of thought perform a great office in literature, second only to that of originators.

sion: we are thinking of the close, when we should be employed in adorning the thought. It makes a poet giddy with turning in a space too narrow for his imagination." *

Dryden himself, as was not always the case with him, was well satisfied with his work. He calls it his best hitherto, and attributes his success to the excellence of his subject, "incomparably the best he had ever had, *excepting only the Royal Family.*" The first part is devoted to the Dutch war; the last to the fire of London. The martial half is infinitely the better of the two. He altogether surpasses his model, Davenant. If his poem lack the gravity of thought attained by a few stanzas of "Gondibert," it is vastly superior in life, in picturesqueness, in the energy of single lines, and, above all, in imagination. Few men have read "Gondibert," and almost every one speaks of it, as commonly of the dead, with a certain subdued respect. And it deserves respect as an honest effort to bring poetry back to its highest office in the ideal treatment of life. Davenant emulated Spenser, and if his poem had been as good as his preface, it could still be read in another spirit than that of investigation. As it is, it always reminds me of Goldsmith's famous verse. It is remote, unfriendly, solitary, and, above all, slow. Its shining passages, for there are such, remind one of distress-rockets sent up at intervals from a ship just about to founder, and sadden rather than cheer.†

* Essay on Satire. What he has said just before this about Butler is worth noting. Butler had had a chief hand in the "Rehearsal," but Dryden had no grudges where the question was of giving its just praise to merit.

† The conclusion of the second canto of Book Third is the best continuously fine passage. Dryden's poem has nowhere so much meaning in so small space as Davenant, when he says of the sense of honour that,

"Like Power, it grows to nothing, growing less."

Davenant took the hint of the stanza from Sir John Davies. Wyatt first used it, so far as I know, in English.

The first part of the "Annus Mirabilis" is by no means clear of the false taste of the time,* though it has some of Dryden's manliest verses and happiest comparisons, always his two distinguishing merits. Here, as almost everywhere else in Dryden, measuring him merely as poet, we recall what he, with pathetic pride, says of himself in the prologue to "Aurengzebe":—

> "Let him retire, betwixt two ages cast,
> The first of this, the hindmost of the last."

What can be worse than what he says of comets?—

> "Whether they unctuous exhalations are
> Fired by the sun, or seeming so alone,
> Or each some more remote and slippery star
> Which loses footing when to mortals shown."

Or than this, of the destruction of the Dutch India-ships?—

> "Amidst whole heaps of spices lights a ball,
> And now their odours armed against them fly;
> Some preciously by shattered porcelain fall,
> And some by aromatic splinters die."

Dear Dr. Johnson had his doubts about Shakespeare, but here at least was poetry! This is one of the quatrains which he pronounces "worthy of our author."†

But Dryden himself has said that "a man who is resolved

* Perhaps there is no better lecture on the prevailing vices of style and thought (if thought this frothy ferment of the mind may be called) than in Cotton Mather's "Magnalia." For Mather, like a true provincial, appropriates only the mannerism, and, as is usual in such cases, betrays all its weakness by the unconscious parody of exaggeration.

† The Doctor was a capital judge of the substantial value of the goods he handled, but his judgment always seems that of the thumb and forefinger. For the shades, the disposition of colours, the beauty of the figures, he has as good as no sense whatever. The critical parts of his Life of Dryden seem to me the best of his writing in this kind. There is little to be gleaned after him. He had studied his author, which he seldom did, and his criticism is sympathetic, a thing still rarer with him. As illustrative of his own habits, his remarks on Dryden's reading are curious.

to praise an author with any appearance of justice must be sure to take him on the strongest side, and where he is least liable to exceptions." This is true also of one who wishes to measure an author fairly, for the higher wisdom of criticism lies in the capacity to admire.

> "Leser, wie gefall ich dir?
> Leser, wie gefällst du mir?"

are both fair questions, the answer to the first being more often involved in that to the second than is sometimes thought. The poet in Dryden was never more fully revealed than in such verses as these:—

> "And threatening France, placed like a painted Jove,*
> Kept idle thunder in his lifted hand;"
>
> "Silent in smoke of cannon they come on;"
>
> "And his loud guns speak thick, like angry men;"
>
> "The vigorous seaman every port-hole plies,
> And adds his heart to every gun he fires;"
>
> "And, though to me unknown, they sure fought well,
> Whom Rupert led, and who were British born."

This is masculine writing, and yet it must be said that there is scarcely a quatrain in which the rhyme does not

* Perhaps the hint was given by a phrase of Corneille, *monarque en peinture*. Dryden seldom borrows, unless from Shakespeare, without improving, and he borrowed a great deal. Thus in "Don Sebastian" (of suicide):—

> "Brutus and Cato might discharge their souls,
> And give them furloughs for the other world;
> But we, like sentries, are obliged to stand
> In starless nights and wait the appointed hour."

The thought is Cicero's, but how it is intensified by the "starless nights!" Dryden, I suspect, got it from his favourite, Montaigne, who says, "Que nous ne pouvons abandonner cette garnison du monde, sans le commandement exprez de celuy qui nous y a mis." (L. ii. chap. 3.) In the same play, by a very Drydenish verse, he gives new force to an old comparison:—

> "And I should break through laws divine and human,
> And think 'em cobwebs spread for little man,
> *Which all the bulky herd of Nature breaks.*"

trip him into a platitude, and there are too many swaggering with that *expression forte d'un sentiment faible* which Voltaire condemns in Corneille,—a temptation to which Dryden always lay too invitingly open. But there are passages higher in kind than any I have cited, because they show imagination. Such are the verses in which he describes the dreams of the disheartened enemy :—

> " In dreams they fearful precipices tread,
> Or, shipwrecked, labour to some distant shore,
> Or in dark churches walk among the dead ; "

and those in which he recalls glorious memories, and sees where

> " The mighty ghosts of our great Harries rose,
> And armëd Edwards looked with anxious eyes."

A few verses, like the pleasantly alliterative one in which he makes the spider " from the silent ambush of his den," " feel far off the trembling of his thread," show that he was beginning to study the niceties of verse, instead of trusting wholly to what he would have called his natural *fougue*. On the whole, this part of the poem is very good war poetry, as war poetry goes (for there is but one first-rate poem of the kind in English,—short, national, eager, as if the writer were personally engaged, with the rapid metre of a drum beating the charge,—and that is Drayton's " Battle of Agincourt,"*) but it shows more study of Lucan than of Virgil, and for a long time yet we shall find Dryden bewildered by bad models. He is always imitating—no that is not the word, always emulating—somebody in his more strictly poetical attempts, for in that direction he always needed some external impulse to set his mind in motion. This is more or less true of all authors ; nor does it detract from their originality, which depends wholly on their being able so far to forget themselves as to let something of themselves

* Not his solemn historical droning under that title, but addressed " To the Cambrio-Britons on their harp."

slip into what they write.* Of absolute originality we will not speak till authors are raised by some Deucalion-and-Pyrrha process; and even then our faith would be small, for writers who have no past are pretty sure of having no future. Dryden, at any rate, always had to have his copy set him at the top of the page, and wrote ill or well accordingly. His mind (somewhat solid for a poet) warmed slowly, but, once fairly heated through, he had more of that good-luck of self-oblivion than most men. He certainly gave even a liberal interpretation to Molière's rule of taking his own property wherever he found it, though he sometimes blundered awkwardly about what was properly *his;* but in literature, it should be remembered, a thing always becomes his at last who says it best, and thus makes it his own.†

Mr. Savage Landor once told me that he said to Wordsworth: "Mr. Wordsworth, a man may mix poetry

* "Les poëtes euxmêmes s'animent et s'échauffent par la lecture des autres poëtes. Messieurs de Malherbe, Corneille, etc., se disposoient au travail par la lecture des poëtes qui étoient de leur gout."—Vigneul, Marvilliana, I. 64, 65.

† For example, Waller had said,

> "Others may use the ocean as their road,
> Only the English *make it their abode;*
> . . . . .
> We *tread on billows with a steady foot,*"—

long before Campbell. Campbell helps himself to both thoughts, enlivens them into

> "Her march is o'er the mountain wave,
> Her home is on the deep,"

and they are his forevermore. His "leviathans afloat" he *lifted* from the "Annus Mirabilis;" but in what court could Dryden sue? Again, Waller in another poem calls the Duke of York's flag

> "His dreadful streamer, like a comet's hair;"

and this, I believe, is the first application of the celestial portent to this particular comparison. Yet Milton's "imperial ensign" waves defiant behind his impregnable lines, and even Campbell flaunts his "meteor flag" in Waller's face. Gray's bard might be sent to the lock-up, but even he would find bail.

> "C'est imiter quelqu'un que de planter des choux."

with prose as much as he pleases, and it will only elevate and enliven; but the moment he mixes a particle of prose with his poetry, it precipitates the whole." Wordsworth, he added, never forgave him. The always hasty Dryden, as I think I have already said, was liable, like a careless apothecary's 'prentice, to make the same confusion of ingredients, especially in the more mischievous way. I cannot leave the "Annus Mirabilis" without giving an example of this. Describing the Dutch prizes, rather like an auctioneer than a poet, he says that

> "Some English wool, vexed in a Belgian loom,
> And into cloth of spongy softness made,
> Did into France or colder Denmark doom,
> To ruin with worse ware our staple trade."

One might fancy this written by the secretary of a board of trade in an unguarded moment; but we should remember that the poem is dedicated to the city of London. The depreciation of the rival fabrics is exquisite; and Dryden, the most English of our poets, would not be so thoroughly English if he had not in him some fibre of *la nation boutiquière*. Let us now see how he succeeds in attempting to infuse science (the most obstinately prosy material) with poetry. Speaking of "a more exact knowledge of the longitudes," as he explains in a note, he tells us that,

> "Then we upon our globe's last verge shall go,
> And view the ocean leaning on the sky;
> From thence our rolling neighbours we shall know,
> And on the lunar world securely pry."

Dr. Johnson confesses that he does not understand this. Why should he, when it is plain that Dryden was wholly in the dark himself? To understand it is none of my business, but I confess that it interests me as an Americanism. We have hitherto been credited as the inventors of the "jumping-off place" at the extreme western verge of the world. But Dryden was beforehand with us. Though he doubtless knew that the earth was a sphere (and perhaps that it was flattened at the poles), it was always a flat

surface in his fancy. In his "Amphitryon," he makes Alcmena say :—

> "No, I would fly thee to the ridge of earth,
> And leap the precipice to 'scape thy sight."

And in his "Spanish Friar," Lorenzo says to Elvira that they "will travel together to the ridge of the world, and then drop together into the next." It is idle for us poor Yankees to hope that we can invent anything. To say sooth, if Dryden had left nothing behind him but the "Annus Mirabilis," he might have served as a type of the kind of poet America would have produced by the biggest-river-and-tallest-mountain recipe,—longitude and latitude in plenty, with marks of culture scattered here and there like the *carets* on a proof-sheet.

It is now time to say something of Dryden as a dramatist. In the thirty-two years between 1662 and 1694 he produced twenty-five plays, and assisted Lee in two. I have hinted that it took Dryden longer than most men to find the true bent of his genius. On a superficial view, he might almost seem to confirm that theory, maintained by Johnson, among others, that genius was nothing more than great intellectual power exercised persistently in some particular direction which chance decided, so that it lay in circumstance merely whether a man should turn out a Shakespeare or a Newton. But when we come to compare what he wrote, regardless of Minerva's averted face, with the spontaneous production of his happier muse, we shall be inclined to think his example one of the strongest cases against the theory in question. He began his dramatic career, as usual, by rowing against the strong current of his nature, and pulled only the more doggedly the more he felt himself swept down the stream. His first attempt was at comedy, and, though his earliest piece of that kind (the "Wild Gallant," 1663) utterly failed, he wrote eight others afterwards. On the 23d February 1663 Pepys writes in his diary : "To Court, and there saw the 'Wild Gallant' performed by the king's house ; but it was ill acted, and the play so poor a thing as I never saw in

my life almost, and so little answering the name, that, from the beginning to the end, I could not, nor can at this time, tell certainly which was the Wild Gallant. The king did not seem pleased at all the whole play, nor anybody else." After some alteration, it was revived with more success. On its publication in 1669 Dryden honestly admitted its former failure, though with a kind of salvo for his self-love. "I made the town my judges, and the greater part condemned it. After which I do not think it my concernment to defend it with the ordinary zeal of a poet for his decried poem, though Corneille is more resolute in his preface before 'Pertharite,'* which was condemned more universally than this. . . . Yet it was received at Court, and was more than once the divertisement of his Majesty by his own command." Pepys lets us amusingly behind the scenes in the matter of His Majesty's divertisement. Dryden does not seem to see that in the condemnation of something meant to amuse the public there can be no question of degree. To fail at all is to fail utterly.

"*Tous les genres sont permis, hors le genre ennuyeux.*"

In the reading, at least, all Dryden's comic writing for the stage must be ranked with the latter class. He himself would fain make an exception of the "Spanish Friar," but I confess that I rather wonder at than envy those who can be amused by it. His comedies lack everything that a comedy should have,—lightness, quickness of transition, unexpectedness of incident, easy cleverness of dialogue, and humorous contrast of character brought out by identity of situation. The comic parts of the "Maiden Queen" seem to me Dryden's best, but the merit even of these is Shakespeare's, and there is little choice where even the best is only tolerable. The common quality, however, of all Dryden's comedies is their nastiness, the more remarkable because we have ample evidence that he was a man of modest conversation. Pepys, who was by no

* Corneille's tragedy of "Pertharite" was acted unsuccessfully in 1659. Racine made free use of it in his more fortunate "Andromaque."

means squeamish (for he found "Sir Martin Marall" "the most entire piece of mirth . . . . that certainly ever was writ . . . . very good wit therein, not fooling"), writes in his diary of the 17th June 1668: "My wife and Deb to the king's playhouse to-day, thinking to spy me there, and saw the new play, 'Evening Love,' of Dryden's, which, though the world commends, she likes not." The next day he saw it himself, "and do not like it, it being very smutty, and nothing so good as the 'Maiden Queen' or the 'Indian Emperor' of Dryden's making. *I was troubled at it.*" On the 22nd he adds: "Calling this day at Herringman's,* he tells me Dryden do himself call it but a fifth-rate play." This was no doubt true, and yet, though Dryden in his preface to the play says, "I confess I have given [yielded] too much to the people in it, and am ashamed for them as well as for myself, that I have pleased them at so cheap a rate," he takes care to add, "not that there is anything here that I would not defend to an ill-natured judge." The plot was from Calderon, and the author, rebutting the charge of plagiarism, tell us that the king ("without whose command they should no longer be troubled with anything of mine") had already answered for him by saying, "that he only desired that those who accused me of theft would always steal him plays like mine." Of the morals of the play he has not a word, nor do I believe that he was conscious of any harm in them till he was attacked by Collier, and then (with some protest against what he considers the undue severity of his censor) he had the manliness to confess that he had done wrong. "It becomes me not to draw my pen in the defence of a bad cause, when I have so often drawn it for a good one."† And in a letter to his correspondent, Mrs. Thomas, written only a few weeks before his death, warning her against Mrs. Behn, he says, with remorseful sincerity: "I confess I am the last man in the world who ought in justice to arraign her, who have been myself too much a libertine in most of my poems, which I should be well contented I had time either to purge or to see them fairly

* Dryden's publisher. † Preface to the Fables.

burned." Congreve was less patient, and even Dryden, in the last epilogue he ever wrote, attempts an excuse:—

> "Perhaps the Parson stretched a point too far,
> When with our Theatres he waged a war;
> He tells you that this very moral age
> Received the first infection from the Stage,
> But sure a banished Court, with lewdness fraught,
> The seeds of open vice returning brought.
> . . . .
> Whitehall the naked Venus first revealed,
> Who, standing, as at Cyprus, in her shrine,
> The strumpet was adored with rites divine.
> . . . . .
> The poets, who must live by courts or starve,
> Were proud so good a Government to serve,
> And, mixing with buffoons and pimps profane,
> Tainted the Stage for some small snip of gain."

Dryden least of all men should have stooped to this palliation, for he had, not without justice, said of himself: "The same parts and application which have made me a poet might have raised me to any honours of the gown." Milton and Marvell neither lived by the Court, nor starved. Charles Lamb most ingeniously defends the Comedy of the Restoration as "the sanctuary and quiet Alsatia of hunted casuistry," where there was no pretence of representing a real world.* But this was certainly not so. Dryden again and again boasts of the superior advantage which his age had over that of the elder dramatists, in painting polite life, and attributes it to a greater freedom of intercourse between the poets and the frequenters of the Court.† We shall be less surprised at the *kind* of refinement upon which Dryden congratulated himself, when we learn (from the dedication of "Marriage à la Mode") that the Earl of Rochester was its exemplar: "The best comic writers of

* I interpret some otherwise ambiguous passages in this charming and acute essay by its title: "On the *artificial* comedy of the last century."

† See especially his defence of the epilogue to the Second Part of the "Conquest of Granada" (1672).

our age will join with me to acknowledge that they have copied the gallantries of courts, the delicacy of expression, and the decencies of behaviour from your Lordship." In judging Dryden, it should be borne in mind that for some years he was under contract to deliver three plays a-year, a kind of bond to which no man should subject his brain who has a decent respect for the quality of its products. We should remember, too, that in his day *manners* meant what we call *morals*, that custom always makes a larger part of virtue among average men than they are quite aware, and that the reaction from an outward conformity which had no root in inward faith may for a time have given to the frank expression of laxity an air of honesty that made it seem almost refreshing. There is no such hotbed for excess of license as excess of restraint, and the arrogant fanaticism of a single virtue is apt to make men suspicious of tyranny in all the rest. But the riot of emancipation could not last long, for the more tolerant society is of private vice, the more exacting will it be of public decorum, that excellent thing, so often the plausible substitute for things more excellent. By 1678 the public mind had so far recovered its tone that Dryden's comedy of "Limberham" was barely tolerated for three nights. I will let the man who looked at human nature from more sides, and therefore judged it more gently than any other, give the only excuse possible for Dryden:—

> "Men's judgments are
> A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
> Do draw the inward quality after them
> To suffer all alike."

Dryden's own apology only makes matters worse for him by showing that he committed his offences with his eyes wide open, and that he wrote comedies so wholly in despite of nature as never to deviate into the comic. Failing as clown, he did not scruple to take on himself the office of Chiffinch to the palled appetite of the public. "For I confess my chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live. If the humour of this be for low

comedy, small accidents, and raillery, I will force my genius to obey it, though with more reputation I could write in verse. I know I am not so fitted by nature to write comedy; I want that gayety of humour which is requisite to it. My conversation is slow and dull, my humour saturnine and reserved: In short, I am none of those who endeavour to break jests in company or make repartees. So that those who decry my comedies do me no injury, except it be in point of profit: Reputation in them is the last thing to which I shall pretend."* For my own part, though I have been forced to hold my nose in picking my way through these ordures of Dryden, I am free to say that I think them far less morally mischievous than that *corps-de-ballet* literature in which the most animal of the passions is made more temptingly naked by a veil of French gauze. Nor does Dryden's lewdness leave such a reek in the mind as the filthy cynicism of Swift, who delighted to uncover the nakedness of our common mother.

It is pleasant to follow Dryden into the more congenial region of heroic plays, though here also we find him making a false start. Anxious to please the king,† and so able a reasoner as to convince even himself of the justice of whatever cause he argued, he not only wrote tragedies in the French style, but defended his practice in an essay which is by far the most delightful reproduction of the classic dialogue ever written in English. Eugenius (Lord Buckhurst), Lisideius (Sir Charles Sidley), Crites (Sir R. Howard), and Neander (Dryden) are the four partakers in the debate. The comparative merits of ancients and moderns, of the Shakespearian and contemporary drama, of rhyme and blank verse, the value of the three (supposed) Aristotelian unities, are the main topics discussed. The tone of the discussion is admirable, midway between bookishness and

* Defence of an Essay on Dramatick Poesy.

† "The favour which heroick plays have lately found upon our theatres has been wholly derived to them from the countenance and approbation they have received at Court."—(Dedication of "Indian Emperor" to Duchess of Monmouth.)

talk, and the fairness with which each side of the argument is treated shows the breadth of Dryden's mind perhaps better than any other one piece of his writing. There are no men of straw set up to be knocked down again, as there commonly are in debates conducted upon this plan. The "Defence" of the Essay is to be taken as a supplement to Neander's share in it, as well as many scattered passages in subsequent prefaces and dedications. All the interlocutors agree that "the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers," and that "our poesy is much improved by the happiness of some writers yet living, who first taught us to mould our thoughts into easy and significant words, to retrench the superfluities of expression, and to make our rhyme so properly a part of the verse that it should never mislead the sense, but itself be led and governed by it." In another place he shows that by "living writers" he meant Waller and Denham. "Rhyme has all the advantages of prose besides its own. But the excellence and dignity of it were never fully known till Mr. Waller taught it: he first made writing easily an art; first showed us to conclude the sense, most commonly in distiches, which in the verse before him runs on for so many lines together that the reader is out of breath to overtake it."* Dryden afterwards changed his mind, and one of the excellences of his own rhymed verse is, that his sense is too ample to be concluded by the distich. Rhyme had been censured as unnatural in dialogue; but Dryden replies that it is no more so than blank verse, since no man talks any kind of verse in real life. But the argument for rhyme is of another kind. "I am satisfied if it cause delight, for delight is the chief if not the only end of poesy [he should have said *means*]; instruction can be admitted but in the second place, for poesy only instructs as it delights. . . . The converse, therefore, which a poet is to imitate must be heightened with all the arts and ornaments of poesy, and must be such as, strictly considered, could

* Dedication of "Rival Ladies."

never be supposed spoken by any without premeditation. . . . Thus prose, though the rightful prince, yet is by common consent deposed as too weak for the government of serious plays, and, he failing, there now start up two competitors; one the nearer in blood, which is blank verse; the other more fit for the ends of government, which is rhyme. Blank verse is, indeed, the nearer prose, but he is blemished with the weakness of his predecessor. Rhyme (for I will deal clearly) has somewhat of the usurper in him; but he is brave and generous, and his dominion pleasing."* To the objection that the difficulties of rhyme will lead to circumlocution, he answers in substance, that a good poet will know how to avoid them.

It is curious how long the superstition that Waller was the refiner of English verse has prevailed since Dryden first gave it vogue. He was a very poor poet and a purely mechanical versifier. He has lived mainly on the credit of a single couplet,

> "The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks that Time hath made,"

in which the melody alone belongs to him, and the conceit, such as it is, to Samuel Daniel, who said, long before, that the body's

> "Walls, grown thin, permit the mind
> To look out thorough and his frailty find."

Waller has made worse nonsense of it in the transfusion. It might seem that Ben Jonson had a prophetic foreboding of him when he wrote—"Others there are that have no composition at all, but a kind of tuning and rhyming fall, in what they write. It runs and slides and only makes a sound. Women's poets they are called, as you have women's tailors.

> They write a verse as smooth, as soft, as cream,
> In which there is no torrent, nor scarce stream.

* Defence of the Essay. Dryden, in the happiness of his illustrative comparisons, is almost unmatched. Like himself, they occupy a middle ground between poetry and prose,—they are a cross between metaphor and simile.

You may sound these wits and find the depth of them with your middle-finger."* It seems to have been taken for granted by Waller, as afterwards by Dryden, that our elder poets bestowed no thought upon their verse. "Waller was smooth," but unhappily he was also flat, and his importation of the French theory of the couplet as a kind of thought-coop did nothing but mischief.† He never compassed even a smoothness approaching this description of a nightingale's song by a third-rate poet of the earlier school,—

> "Trails her plain ditty in one long-spun note
> Through the sleek passage of her open throat,
> A clear, unwrinkled song,"—

one of whose beauties is its running over into the third verse. Those poets indeed

> "Felt music's pulse in all her arteries;"

and Dryden himself found out, when he came to try it, that blank verse was not so easy a thing as he at first conceived it, nay, that it is the most difficult of all verse, and that it must make up in harmony, by variety of pause and modulation, for what it loses in the melody of rhyme. In what makes the chief merit of his later versification, he but rediscovered the secret of his predecessors in giving to rhymed pentameters something of the freedom of blank verse, and not mistaking metre for rhythm.

Voltaire, in his Commentary on Corneille, has sufficiently lamented the awkwardness of movement imposed upon the French dramatists by the gyves of rhyme. But he considers

* Discoveries.

† What a wretched rhymer he could be we may see in his *alteration* of the "Maid's Tragedy" of Beaumont and Fletcher:—

> "Not long since walking in the field,
> My nurse and I, we there beheld
> A goodly fruit; which, tempting me,
> I would have plucked; but, trembling, she,
> Whoever eat those berries, cried,
> In less than half-an-hour died!"

What intolerable seesaw! Not much of Byron's "fatal facility" in *these* octosyllabics!

the necessity of overcoming this obstacle, on the whole, an advantage. Difficulty is his tenth and superior muse. How did Dryden, who says nearly the same thing, succeed in his attempt at the French manner? He fell into every one of its vices, without attaining much of what constitutes its excellence. From the nature of the language, all French poetry is purely artificial, and its high polish is all that keeps out decay. The length of their dramatic verse forces the French into much tautology, into bombast in its original meaning, the stuffing out a thought with words till it fills the line. The rigid system of their rhyme, which makes it much harder to manage than in English, has accustomed them to inaccuracies of thought which would shock them in prose. For example, in the "Cinna" of Corneille, as originally written, Emilie says to Augustus,—

> "Ces flammes dans nos cœurs dès longtemps étoient nées,
> Et ce sont des secrets de plus de quatre années."

I say nothing of the second verse, which is purely prosaic surplusage exacted by the rhyme, nor of the jingling together of *ces*, *dès*, *étoient*, *nées*, *des*, and *secrets*, but I confess that *nées* does not seem to be the epithet that Corneille would have chosen for *flammes*, if he could have had his own way, and that flames would seem of all things the hardest to keep secret. But in revising, Corneille changed the first verse thus,—

> "Ces flammes dans nos cœurs *sans votre ordre* étoient nées."

Can anything be more absurd than flames born to order? Yet Voltaire, on his guard against these rhyming pitfalls for the sense, does not notice this in his minute comments on this play. Of extravagant metaphor, the result of this same making sound the file-leader of sense, a single example from "Heraclius" shall suffice:—

> "La vapeur de mon sang ira grossir la foudre
> Que Dieu tient déjà prête à le reduire en poudre."

One cannot think of a Louis Quatorze Appollo except in a full-bottomed periwig, and the tragic style of their poets is

always showing the disastrous influence of that portentous comet. It is the *style perruque* in another than the French meaning of the phrase, and the skill lay in dressing it majestically, so that, as Cibber says, "upon the head of a man of sense, *if it became him*, it could never fail of drawing to him a more partial regard and benevolence than could possibly be hoped for in an ill-made one." It did not become Dryden, and he left it off.*

Like his own Zimri, Dryden was "all for" this or that fancy, till he took up with another. But even while he was writing on French models, his judgment could not be blinded to their defects. "Look upon the 'Cinna' and the 'Pompey,' they are not so properly to be called plays as long discourses of reason of State, and 'Polieucte' in matters of religion is as solemn as the long stops upon our organs; . . . their actors speak by the hour-glass like our parsons. . . . I deny not but this may suit well enough with the French, for as we, who are a more sullen people, come to be diverted at our plays, so they, who are of an airy and gay temper, come thither to make themselves more serious."† With what an air of innocent unconsciousness the sarcasm is driven home! Again, while he was still slaving at these bricks without straw, he says: "The present French poets are generally accused that, wheresoever they lay the scene, or in whatever age, the manners of their heroes are wholly French. Racine's Bajazet is bred at Constantinople, but his civilities are conveyed to him by some secret passage from Versailles into the Seraglio." It is curious that Voltaire, speaking of the *Bérénice* of Racine, praises a passage in it for precisely what Dryden condemns: "Il semble qu'on entende *Henriette* d'Angleterre elle-même parlant au marquis de *Vardes*. La politesse de la cour de *Louis XIV.*, l'agrément de la langue Française, la douceur de la versification la plus naturelle, le sentiment le plus tendre, tout se trouve dans

* In more senses than one. His last and best portrait shows him in his own grey hair.

† Essay on Dramatick Poesy.

ce peu de vers." After Dryden had broken away from the heroic style, he speaks out more plainly. In the Preface to his "All for Love," in reply to some cavils upon "little, and not essential decencies," the decision about which he refers to a master of ceremonies, he goes on to say: "The French poets, I confess, are strict observers of these punctilios, . . . in this nicety of manners does the excellency of French poetry consist. Their heroes are the most civil people breathing, but their good breeding seldom extends to a word of sense. All their wit is in their ceremony; they want the genius which animates our stage, and therefore 't is but necessary, when they cannot please, that they should take care not to offend. . . . They are so careful not to exasperate a critic that they never leave him any work, . . . for no part of a poem is worth our discommending where the whole is insipid, as when we have once tasted palled wine we stay not to examine it glass by glass. But while they affect to shine in trifles, they are often careless in essentials. . . . For my part, I desire to be tried by the laws of my own country." This is said in heat, but it is plain enough that his mind was wholly changed. In his discourse on epic poetry he is as decided, but more temperate. He says that the French heroic verse "runs with more activity than strength.* Their language is not strung with sinews like our English; it has the nimbleness of a greyhound, but not the bulk and body of a mastiff. Our men and our verses overbear them by their weight, and *pondere, non numero,* is the British motto. The French have set up purity for the standard of their language, and a masculine vigour is that of ours. Like their tongue is the

* A French hendecasyllable verse runs exactly like our ballad measure;—

> A cobbler there was and he lived in a stall, . . .
> *La raison, pour marcher, n'a souvent qu'une voye.*
>
> (Dryden's note.)

The verse is not a hendecasyllable. "Attended watchfully to her recitative (Mlle. Duchesnois), and find that, in nine lines out of ten, 'A cobbler there was,' etc., *is* the tune of the French heroics."—*Moore's Diary,* 24th April 1821.

genius of their poets,—light and trifling in comparison of the English."*

Dryden might have profited by an admirable saying of his own, that "they who would combat general authority with particular opinion must first establish themselves a reputation of understanding better than other men." He understood the defects much better than the beauties of the French theatre. Lessing was even more one-sided in his judgment upon it.† Goethe, with his usual wisdom, studied it carefully without losing his temper, and tried to profit by its structural merits. Dryden, with his eyes wide open, copied its worst faults, especially its declamatory sentiment. He should have known that certain things can never be transplanted, and that among these is a style of poetry whose great excellence was that it was in perfect sympathy with the genius of the people among whom it came into being. But the truth is, that Dryden had no aptitude whatever for the stage, and in writing for it he was attempting to make a trade of his genius,—an arrangement from which the genius always withdraws in disgust. It was easier to make loose thinking and the bad writing which betrays it pass unobserved while the ear was occupied with the sonorous music of the rhyme to which they marched. Except in "All for Love," "the only play," he tells us, "which he wrote to please himself,"‡ there is no trace of real passion in any of his tragedies. This, indeed, is inevitable, for there are no characters, but

* "The language of the age is never the language of poetry, except among the French, whose verse, where the thought or image does not support it, differs in nothing from prose."—GRAY to WEST.

† Diderot and Rousseau, however, thought their language unfit for poetry, and Voltaire seems to have half agreed with them. No one has expressed this feeling more neatly than Fauriel: "Nul doute que l'on ne puisse dire en prose des choses éminemment poétiques, tout comme il n'est que trop certain que l'on peut en dire de fort prosaïques en vers, et même en excellents vers, en vers élégamment tournés, et en beau langage. C'est un fait dont je n'ai pas besoin d'indiquer d'exemples: aucune littérature n'en fournirait autant que le nôtre."—Hist. de la Poésie Provençale, II. 237.

‡ Parallel of Poetry and Painting.

only personages, in any except that. That is, in many respects, a noble play, and there are few finer scenes, whether in the conception or the carrying out, than that between Antony and Ventidius in the first act.*

As usual, Dryden's good sense was not blind to the extravagances of his dramatic style. In "Mac Flecknoe" he makes his own Maximin the type of childish rant,

> "And little Maximins the gods defy;"

but, as usual also, he could give a plausible reason for his own mistakes by means of that most fallacious of all fallacies which is true so far as it goes. In his Prologue to the "Royal Martyr" he says:—

> "And he who servilely creeps after sense
> Is safe, but ne'er will reach an excellence.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> But, when a tyrant for his theme he had,
> He loosed the reins and let his muse run mad,
> And, though he stumbles in a full career,
> Yet rashness is a better fault than fear;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> They then, who of each trip advantage take,
> Find out those faults which they want wit to make."

And in the Preface to the same play he tells us: "I have not everywhere observed the equality of numbers in my verse, partly by reason of my haste, but more especially because I *would not have my sense a slave to syllables.*" Dryden, when he had not a bad case to argue, would have had small respect for the wit whose skill lay in the making of faults, and has himself, where his self-love was not engaged, admirably defined the boundary which divides boldness from rashness. What Quintilian says of Seneca applies very aptly to Dryden: "Velles eum suo ingenio dixisse, alieno judicio."† He was thinking of himself, I fancy, when he makes Ventidius say of Antony,—

* "Il y a seulement la scène de *Ventidius* et d' *Antoine* qui est digne de Corneille. C'est là le sentiment de milord Bolingbroke et de tous les bons auteurs; c'est ainsi que pensait Addisson."—VOLTAIRE to M. DE FROMONT, 15th November 1735.

† Inst. X., i. 129.

"He starts out wide
And bounds into a vice that bears him far
From his first course, and plunges him in ills;
But, when his danger makes him find his fault,
Quick to observe, and full of sharp remorse,
He censures eagerly his own misdeeds,
Judging himself with malice to himself,
And not forgiving what as man he did,
Because his other parts are more than man."

But bad though they nearly all are as wholes, his plays contain passages which only the great masters have surpassed, and to the level of which no subsequent writer for the stage has ever risen. The necessity of rhyme often forced him to a platitude, as where he says,—

"My love was blind to your deluding art,
But blind men feel when stabbed so near the heart."*

But even in rhyme he not seldom justifies his claim to the title of "glorious John." In the very play from which I have just quoted are these verses in his best manner:—

"No, like his better Fortune I'll appear,
With open arms, loose veil, and flowing hair,
Just flying forward from her rolling sphere."

His comparisons, as I have said, are almost always happy. This, from the "Indian Emperor," is tenderly pathetic:—

"As callow birds,
Whose mother 's killed in seeking of the prey,
Cry in their nest and think her long away,
And, at each leaf that stirs, each blast of wind,
Gape for the food which they must never find."

And this, of the anger with which the Maiden Queen, striving to hide her jealousy, betrays her love, is vigorous:—

"Her rage was love, and its tempestuous flame,
Like lightning, showed the heaven from whence it came."

The following simile from the "Conquest of Grenada" is as well expressed as it is apt in conception:—

"I scarcely understand my own intent;
But, silk-worm like, so long within have wrought,
That I am lost in my own web of thought."

* Conquest of Grenada, Second Part.

In the "Rival Ladies," Angelina, walking in the dark, describes her sensations naturally and strikingly :—

> "No noise but what my footsteps make, and they
> Sound dreadfully and louder than by day :
> They double too, and every step I take
> Sounds thick, methinks, and more than one could make."

In all the rhymed plays* there are many passages which one is rather inclined to like than sure he would be right in liking them. The following verses from "Aurengzebe" are of this sort :—

> "My love was such it needed no return,
> Rich in itself, like elemental fire,
> Whose pureness does no aliment require."

This is Cowleyish, and *pureness* is surely the wrong word ; and yet it is better than mere commonplace. Perhaps what oftenest turns the balance in Dryden's favour, when we are weighing his claims as a poet, is his persistent capability of enthusiasm. To the last he kindles and sometimes *almost* flashes out that supernatural light which is the supreme test of poetic genius. As he himself so finely and characteristically says in "Aurengzebe," there was no period in his life when it was not true of him that

> "He felt the inspiring heat, the absent god return."

The verses which follow are full of him, and, with the exception of the single word *underwent*, are in his luckiest manner :—

> "One loose, one sally of a hero's soul,
> Does all the military art control.
> While timorous wit goes round, or fords the shore,
> He shoots the gulf, and is already o'er,
> And, when the enthusiastic fit is spent,
> Looks back amazed at what he underwent."†

Pithy sentences and phrases always drop from Dryden's pen as if unawares, whether in prose or verse. I string together a few at random :—

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* In most, he mingles blank verse. † Conquest of Grenada.

"The greatest argument for love is love."

"Few know the use of life before 't is past."

"Time gives himself and is not valuëd."

"Death in itself is nothing; but we fear
To be we know not what, we know not where."

"Love either finds equality or makes it;
Like death, he knows no difference in degrees."

"That 's empire, that which I can give away."

"Yours is a soul irregularly great,
Which, wanting temper, yet abounds in heat."

"Forgiveness to the injured does belong,
But they ne'er pardon who have done the wrong."

"Poor women's thoughts are all extempore."

"The cause of love can never be assigned,
'T is in no face, but in the lover's mind."†

"Heaven can forgive a crime to penitence,
For Heaven can judge if penitence be true;
But man, who knows not hearts, should make examples."

"Kings' titles commonly begin by force,
Which time wears off and mellows into right."

"Fear 's a large promiser; who subject live
To that base passion, know not what they give."

"The secret pleasure of the generous act
Is the great mind's great bribe."

"That bad thing, gold, buys all good things."

"Why, love does all that 's noble here below."

"To prove religion true,
If either wit or sufferings could suffice,
All faiths afford the constant and the wise."

But Dryden, as he tells us himself,

"Grew weary of his long-loved mistress, Rhyme;
Passion 's too fierce to be in fetters bound,
And Nature flies him like enchanted ground."

The finest things in his plays were written in blank verse,

† This recalls a striking verse of Alfred de Musset:—

"La muse est toujours belle,
Même pour l'insensé, même pour l'impuissant,
*Car sa beauté pour nous, c'est notre amour pour elle.*"

as vernacular to him as the alexandrine to the French. In this he vindicates his claim as a poet. His diction gets wings, and both his verse and his thought become capable of a reach which was denied them when set in the stocks of the couplet. The solid man becomes even airy in this new-found freedom: Anthony says,

> "How I loved,
> Witness ye days and nights, and all ye hours
> That *danced away with down upon your feet.*"

And what image was ever more delicately exquisite, what movement more fadingly accordant with the sense, than in the last two verses of the following passage?

> "I feel death rising higher still and higher,
> Within my bosom; every breath I fetch
> Shuts up my life within a shorter compass,
> *And, like the vanishing sound of bells, grows less*
> *And less each pulse, till it be lost in air.*"*

Nor was he altogether without pathos, though it is rare with him. The following passage seems to me tenderly full of it:—

> "Something like
> That voice, methinks, I should have somewhere heard;
> But floods of woe have hurried it far off
> Beyond my ken of soul."†

And this single verse from "Aurengzebe":—

> "Live still! oh live! live even to be unkind!"

with its passionate eagerness and sobbing repetition, is worth a ship-load of the long-drawn treacle of modern self-compassion.

Now and then, to be sure, we come upon something that makes us hesitate again whether, after all, Dryden was not grandiose rather than great, as in the two passages that next follow:—

> "He looks secure of death, superior greatness,
> Like Jove when he made Fate and said, Thou art
> The slave of my creation."‡

* Rival Ladies. † Don Sebastian. ‡ Ibid.

> " I'm pleased with my own work ; Jove was not more
> With infant nature, when his spacious hand
> Had rounded this huge ball of earth and seas,
> To give it the first push and see it roll
> Along the vast abyss."*

I should say that Dryden is more apt to dilate our fancy than our thought, as great poets have the gift of doing. But if he have not the potent alchemy that transmutes the lead of our commonplace associations into gold, as Shakespeare knows how to do so easily, yet his sense is always up to the sterling standard; and though he has not added so much as some have done to the stock of bullion which others afterwards coin and put into circulation, there are few who have minted so many phrases that are still a part of our daily currency. The first line of the following passage has been worn pretty smooth, but the succeeding ones are less familiar :—

> " Men are but children of a larger growth,
> Our appetites as apt to change as theirs,
> And full as craving too and full as vain ;
> And yet the soul, shut up in her dark room,
> Viewing so clear abroad, at home sees nothing
> But, like a mole in earth, busy and blind,
> Works all her folly up and casts it outward
> In the world's open view."†

The image is mixed and even contradictory, but the thought obtains grace for it. I feel as if Shakespeare would have written *seeing* for *viewing*, thus gaining the strength of repetition in one verse and avoiding the sameness of it in the other. Dryden, I suspect, was not much given to correction, and, indeed, one of the great charms of his best writing is, that everything seems struck off at a heat, as by a superior man in the best mood of his talk. Where he rises, he generally becomes fervent rather than imaginative; his thought does not incorporate itself in metaphor, as in purely poetic minds, but repeats and reinforces itself in simile. Where he *is* imaginative, it is in that lower sense which the poverty of our language, for want of a

* Cleomenes. † All for Love.

better word, compels us to call *picturesque*, and even then he shows little of that finer instinct which suggests so much more than it tells, and works the more powerfully as it taxes more the imagination of the reader. In Donne's "Relic" there is an example of what I mean. He fancies some one breaking up his grave and spying

> "A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,"—

a verse that still shines there in the darkness of the tomb, after two centuries, like one of those inextinguishable lamps whose secret is lost.* Yet Dryden sometimes showed a sense of this magic of a mysterious hint, as in the "Spanish Friar":—

> "No, I confess, you bade me not in words;
> The dial spoke not, but it made shrewd signs,
> And pointed full upon the stroke of murder."

This is perhaps a solitary example. Nor is he always so possessed by the image in his mind as unconsciously to choose even the picturesquely imaginative word. He has done so, however, in this passage from "Marriage à la Mode":—

> "You ne'er must hope again to see your princess,
> Except as prisoners view fair walks and streets,
> And careless passengers going by their grates."

But after all, he is best upon a level, table-land, it is true, and a very high level, but still somewhere between the loftier peaks of inspiration and the plain of everyday life. In those passages where he moralises he is always good, setting some obvious truth in a new light by vigorous phrase and happy illustration. Take this (from "Œdipus") as a proof of it:—

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* Dryden, with his wonted perspicacity, follows Ben Jonson in calling Donne "the greatest wit, though not the best poet, of our nation."—(Dedication of Eleonora). Even as a poet Donne

> "Had in him those brave translunary things
> That our first poets had."

To open vistas for the imagination through the blind wall of the senses, as he could sometimes do, is the supreme function of poetry.

"The gods are just,
But how can finite measure infinite?
Reason! alas, it does not know itself!
Yet man, vain man, would with his short-lined plummet
Fathom the vast abyss of heavenly justice.
Whatever is, is in its causes just,
Since all things are by fate. But purblind man
Sees but a part o' th' chain, the nearest links,
His eyes not carrying to that equal beam
That poises all above."

From the same play I pick an illustration of that ripened sweetness of thought and language which marks the natural vein of Dryden. One cannot help applying the passage to the late Mr. Quincy:—

"Of no distemper, of no blast he died,
But fell like autumn fruit that mellowed long,
E'en wondered at because he dropt no sooner;
Fate seemed to wind him up for fourscore years;
Yet freshly ran he on ten winters more,
Till, like a clock worn out with eating Time,
The wheels of weary life at last stood still."*

Here is another of the same kind from "All for Love:"—

"Gone so soon!
Is Death no more? He used him carelessly,
With a familiar kindness; ere he knocked,
Ran to the door and took him in his arms,
As who should say, You're welcome at all hours,
A friend need give no warning."

With one more extract from the same play, which is in every way his best, for he had, when he wrote it, been feeding on the bee-bread of Shakespeare, I shall conclude. Antony says,

"For I am now so sunk from what I was,
Thou find'st me at my lowest water-mark.
The rivers that ran in and raised my fortunes
Are all dried up, or take another course:
What I have left is from my native spring;
I've a heart still that swells in scorn of Fate,
And lifts me to my banks."

* My own judgment is my sole warrant for attributing these extracts from Œdipus to Dryden rather than Lee.

This is certainly, from beginning to end, in what used to be called the *grand* style, at once noble and natural. I have not undertaken to analyse any one of the plays, for (except in "All for Love") it would have been only to expose their weakness. Dryden had *no* constructive faculty; and in every one of his longer poems that required a plot, the plot is bad, always more or less inconsistent with itself, and rather hitched-on to the subject than combining with it. It is fair to say, however, before leaving this part of Dryden's literary work, that Horne Tooke thought "Don Sebastian" "the best play extant."* Gray admired the plays of Dryden, "not as dramatic compositions, but as poetry."† "There are as many things finely said in his plays as almost by anybody," said Pope to Spence. Of their rant, their fustian, their bombast, their bad English, of their innumerable sins against Dryden's own better conscience both as poet and critic, I shall excuse myself from giving any instances.‡ I like what is good in Dryden so much, and it *is* so good, that I think Gray was justified in always losing his temper when he heard "his faults criticised."§

It is as a satirist and pleader in verse that Dryden is best known, and as both he is in some respects unrivalled. His satire is not so sly as Chaucer's, but it is distinguished by the same good-nature. There is no malice in it. I shall not enter into his literary quarrels further than to say he

* Recollections of Rogers, p. 165.

† Nicholls's Reminiscences of Gray. Pickering's edition of Gray's Works, Vol. V. p. 35.

‡ Let one suffice for all. In the "Royal Martyr," Porphyrius, awaiting his execution, says to Maximin, who had wished him for a son-in-law:—

> "Where'er thou stand'st, I'll level at that place
> My gushing blood, and spout it at thy face;
> Thus not by marriage we our blood will join;
> Nay, more, my arms shall throw my head at thine."

"It is no shame," says Dryden himself, "to be a poet, though it is to be a bad one."

§ Gray, *ubi supra*, p. 38.

seems to me, on the whole, to have been forbearing, which is the more striking as he tells us repeatedly that he was naturally vindictive. It was he who called revenge "the darling attribute of heaven." "I complain not of their lampoons and libels, though I have been the public mark for many years. I am vindictive enough to have repelled force by force, if I could imagine that any of them had ever reached me." It was this feeling of easy superiority, I suspect, that made him the mark for so much jealous vituperation. Scott is wrong in attributing his onslaught upon Settle to jealousy because one of the latter's plays had been performed at Court,—an honour never paid to any of Dryden's.* I have found nothing like a trace of jealousy in that large and benignant nature. In his vindication of the "Duke of Guise," he says, with honest confidence in himself: "Nay, I durst almost refer myself to some of the angry poets on the other side, whether I have not rather countenanced and assisted their beginnings than hindered them from rising." He seems to have been really as indifferent to the attacks on himself as Pope pretended to be. In the same vindication he says of the "Rehearsal," the only one of them that had any wit in it, and it has a great deal: "Much less am I concerned at the noble name of Bayes; that 's a brat so like his own father that he cannot be mistaken for any other body. They might as reasonably have called Tom Sternhold Virgil, and the resemblance would have held as well." In his Essay on Satire he says: "And yet we know that in Christian charity all offences are to be forgiven as we expect the like pardon for those we daily commit against Almighty God.

* Scott had never seen Pepys's Diary when he wrote this, or he would have left it unwritten: "Fell to discourse on the last night's work at Court, where the ladies and Duke of Monmouth acted the 'Indian Emperor,' wherein they told me these things most remarkable that not any woman but the Duchess of Monmouth and Mrs. Cornwallis did anything but like fools and stocks, but that these two did do most extraordinary well; that not any man did anything well but Captain O'Bryan, who spoke and did well, but above all things did dance most incomparably."—14th January 1668.

And this consideration has often made me tremble when I was saying our Lord's Prayer; for the plain condition of the forgiveness which we beg is the pardoning of others the offences which they have done to us; for which reason I have many times avoided the commission of that fault, even when I have been notoriously provoked.* And in another passage he says, with his usual wisdom: "Good sense and good-nature are never separated, though the ignorant world has thought otherwise. Good-nature, by which I mean beneficence and candour, is the product of right reason, which of necessity will give allowance to the failings of others, by considering that there is nothing perfect in mankind." In the same Essay he gives his own receipt for satire:—"How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! but how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms! . . . This is the mystery of that noble trade. . . . Neither is it true that this fineness of raillery is offensive: a witty man is tickled while he is hurt in this manner, and a fool feels it not. . . . There is a vast difference between the slovenly butchering of a man and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as Jack Ketch's wife said of his servant, of a plain piece of work, of a bare hanging; but to make a malefactor die sweetly was only belonging to her husband. I wish I could apply it to myself, if the reader would be kind enough to think it belongs to me. The character of Zimri in my 'Absalom' is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem. It is not bloody, but it is ridiculous enough, and he for whom it was intended was too witty to resent it as an injury. . . . I avoided the mention of great crimes, and applied myself to the representing of blind sides and little extravagances, to which, the wittier a man is, he is generally the more obnoxious."

Dryden thought his genius led him that way. In his

* See also that noble passage in the "Hind and Panther" (1573-1591), where this is put into verse. Dryden always thought in prose.

elegy on the satirist Oldham, whom Hallam, without reading him, I suspect, ranks next to Dryden,* he says :—

> "For sure our souls were near allied, and thine
> Cast in the same poetic mould with mine;
> One common note in either lyre did strike,
> And knaves and fools we both abhorred alike."

His practice is not always so delicate as his theory; but if he was sometimes rough, he never took a base advantage. He knocks his antagonist down, and there an end. Pope seems to have nursed his grudge, and then, watching his chance, to have squirted vitriol from behind a corner, rather glad than otherwise if it fell on the women of those he hated or envied. And if Dryden is never dastardly, as Pope often was, so also he never wrote anything so maliciously depreciatory as Pope's unprovoked attack on Addison. Dryden's satire is often coarse, but where it is coarsest, it is commonly in defence of himself against attacks that were themselves brutal. Then, to be sure, he snatches the first ready cudgel, as in Shadwell's case, though even then there is something of the good-humour of conscious strength. Pope's provocation was too often the mere opportunity to say a biting thing, where he could do it safely. If his victim showed fight, he tried to smooth things over, as with Dennis. Dryden could forget that he had ever had a quarrel, but he never slunk away from any, least of all from one provoked by himself.† Pope's satire is too much occupied with the externals of manners, habits, personal defects, and peculiarities. Dryden goes right to the rooted character of the man, to the weaknesses of his nature, as where he says of Burnet :—

> "Prompt to assail, and careless of defence,
> Invulnerable in his impudence,

* Probably on the authority of this very epitaph, as if epitaphs were to be believed even under oath! A great many authors live because we read nothing but their tombstones. Oldham was, to borrow one of Dryden's phrases, "a bad or, which is worse, an indifferent poet."

† "He was of a nature exceedingly humane and compassionate, easily forgiving injuries, and capable of a prompt and sincere reconciliation with them that had offended him."—CONGREVE.

> He dares the world, and, eager of a name,
> He thrusts about and *justles into fame.*
> So fond of loud report that, not to miss
> Of being known (his last and utmost bliss),
> *He rather would be known for what he is.*"

It would be hard to find in Pope such compression of meaning as in the first, or such penetrative sarcasm as in the second of the passages I have underscored. Dryden's satire is still quoted for its comprehensiveness of application, Pope's rather for the elegance of its finish and the point of its phrase than for any deeper qualities.* I do not remember that Dryden ever makes poverty a reproach.† He was above it, alike by generosity of birth and mind. Pope is always the *parvenu*, always giving himself the airs of a fine gentleman, and, like Horace Walpole and Byron, affecting superiority to professional literature. Dryden, like Lessing, was a hack-writer, and was proud, as an honest man has a right to be, of being able to get his bread by his brains. He lived in Grub Street all his life, and never dreamed that where a man of genius lived was not the best quarter of the town. "Tell his Majesty," said sturdy old Jonson, "that his soul lives in an alley."

Dryden's prefaces are a mine of good writing and judicious criticism. His *obiter dicta* have often the penetration, and always more than the equity, of Voltaire's, for Dryden never loses temper, and never altogether qualifies his judgment by his self-love. "He was a more universal writer

* Coleridge says excellently: "You will find this a good gauge or criterion of genius,—whether it progresses and evolves, or only spins upon itself. Take Dryden's Achitophel and Zimri; every line adds to or modifies the character, which is, as it where, a-building up to the very last verse; whereas in Pope's Timon, etc., the first two or three couplets contain all the pith of the character, and the twenty or thirty lines that follow are so much evidence or proof of overt acts of jealousy, or pride, or whatever it may be that is satirised." (Table-Talk, 192.) Some of Dryden's best satirical *hits* are let fall by seeming accident in his prose, as where he says of his Protestant assailants, "Most of them love all whores but her of Babylon." They had first attacked him on the score of his private morals.

† That he taxes Shadwell with it is only a seeming exception, as any careful reader will see.

than Voltaire," said Horne Tooke, and perhaps it is true that he had a broader view, though his learning was neither so extensive nor so accurate. My space will not afford many extracts, but I cannot forbear one or two. He says of Chaucer, that "he is a perpetual fountain of good sense,"* and likes him better than Ovid,—a bold confession in that day. He prefers the pastorals of Theocritus to those of Virgil. "Virgil's shepherds are too well-read in the philosophy of Epicurus and of Plato;" "there is a kind of rusticity in all those pompous verses, somewhat of a holiday shepherd strutting in his country buskins;"† "Theocritus is softer than Ovid, he touches the passions more delicately, and performs all this out of his own fund, without diving into the arts and sciences for a supply. Even his Doric dialect has an incomparable sweetness in his clownishness, like a fair shepherdess, in her country russet, talking in a Yorkshire tone."‡ Comparing Virgil's verse with that of some poets, he says, that his "numbers are perpetually varied to increase the delight of the reader, so that the same sounds are never repeated twice together. On the contrary, Ovid and Claudian, though they write in styles different from each other, yet have each of them but one sort of music in their verses. All the versification and little variety of Claudian is included within the compass of four or five lines, and then he begins in the same tenor, perpetually closing his sense at the end of a verse and that verse commonly which they call golden, or two substantives and two adjectives with a verb betwixt them to keep the peace. Ovid, with all his sweetness, has as little variety of numbers and sound as he; he is always, as it were, upon the hand-gallop, and his verse runs upon carpet-ground."§ What a dreary half-century would have been saved to English poetry, could Pope have laid these sentences to heart! Upon translation, no one has written so much and so well as Dryden in his various prefaces. Whatever has been said since is either expansion or variation of what

* Preface to Fables.
† Dedication of the Georgics.
‡ Preface to second Miscellany.
§ Ibid.

he had said before. His general theory may be stated as an aim at something between the literalness of metaphrase and the looseness of paraphrase. "Where I have enlarged," he says, "I desire the false critics would not always think that those thoughts are wholly mine, but either *they are secretly in the poet*, or may be fairly deduced from him." Coleridge, with his usual cleverness of *assimilation*, has condensed him in a letter to Wordsworth: "There is no medium between a prose version and one on the avowed principle of *compensation* in the widest sense, i.e. manner, genius, total effect."*

I have selected these passages, not because they are the best, but because they have a near application to Dryden himself. His own characterisation of Chaucer (though too narrow for the greatest but one of English poets) is the best that could be given of himself: "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense." And the other passages show him a close and open-minded student of the art he professed. Has his influence on our literature, but especially on our poetry, been on the whole for good or evil? If he could have been read with the liberal understanding which he brought to the works of others, I should answer at once that it had been beneficial. But his translations and paraphrases, in some ways the best things he did, were done, like his plays, under contract to deliver a certain number of verses for a specified sum. The versification, of which he had learned the art by long practice, is excellent, but his haste has led him to fill out the measure of lines with phrases that add only to dilute, and thus the clearest, the most direct, the most manly versifier of his time became, without meaning it, the source (*fons et origo malorum*) of that poetic diction from which our poetry has not even yet recovered. I do not like to say it, but he has sometimes smothered the childlike simplicity of Chaucer under feather-beds of verbiage. What this kind of thing came to in the next century, when everybody ceremoniously took a bushel-basket to bring a wren's egg to market in, is only too sadly familiar. It is clear that his natural taste led Dryden to

* Memoirs of Wordsworth, Vol. II. p. 74 (American edition).

prefer directness and simplicity of style. If he was too often tempted astray by Artifice, his love of Nature betrays itself in many an almost passionate outbreak of angry remorse. Addison tells us that he took particular delight in the reading of our old English ballads. What he valued above all things was Force, though in his haste he is willing to make a shift with its counterfeit, Effect. As usual, he had a good reason to urge for what he did: "I will not excuse, but justify myself for one pretended crime for which I am liable to be charged by false critics, not only in this translation, but in many of my original poems,—that I Latinise too much. It is true that when I find an English word significant and sounding, I neither borrow from the Latin or any other language; but when I want at home I must seek abroad. If sounding words are not of our growth and manufacture, who shall hinder me to import them from a foreign country? I carry not out the treasure of the nation which is never to return; but what I bring from Italy I spend in England: here it remains, and here it circulates; for if the coin be good, it will pass from one hand to another. I trade both with the living and the dead for the enrichment of our native language. We have enough in England to supply our necessity; but if we will have things of magnificence and splendour, we must get them by commerce. . . . Therefore, if I find a word in a classic author, I propose it to be naturalised by using it myself, and if the public approve of it the bill passes. But every man cannot distinguish betwixt pedantry and poetry; every man, therefore, is not fit to innovate."* This is admirably said, and with Dryden's accustomed penetration to the root of the matter. The Latin has given us most of our canorous words, only they must not be confounded with merely sonorous ones, still less with phrases that, instead of supplementing the sense, encumber it. It was of Latinising

* A Discourse of Epick Poetry. "If the *public* approve." "On ne peut pas admettre dans le développement des langues aucune révolution artificielle et sciemment executée; il n'y a pour elles ni conciles, ni assemblées délibérantes; on ne les réforme pas comme une constitution vicieuse."—RENAN, De l'Origine du Langage, p. 95.

in this sense that Dryden was guilty. Instead of stabbing, he "with steel invades the life." The consequence was that by-and-by we have Dr. Johnson's poet, Savage, telling us,—

> "In front, a parlour meets my entering view,
> Opposed a room to sweet refection due;"

Dr. Blacklock making a forlorn maiden say of her "dear," who is out late,—

> "Or by some apoplectic fit deprest,
> Perhaps, alas! he seeks eternal rest;"

and Mr. Bruce, in a Danish war-song, calling on the vikings to "assume their oars." But it must be admitted of Dryden that he seldom makes the second verse of a couplet the mere train-bearer to the first, as Pope was continually doing. In Dryden the rhyme waits upon the thought; in Pope and his school the thought courtesies to the tune for which it is written.

Dryden has also been blamed for his gallicisms.* He tried some, it is true, but they have not been accepted. I do not think he added a single word to the language, unless, as I suspect, he first used *magnetism* in its present sense of moral attraction. What he did in his best writing was to use the English as if it were a spoken, and not merely an ink-horn language; as if it were his own to do what he pleased with it, as if it need not be ashamed of itself.† In this respect, his service to our prose was greater

* This is an old complaint. Puttenham sighs over such innovation in Elizabeth's time, and Carew in James's. A language grows and is not made. Almost all the new-fangled words with which Jonson taxes Marston in his "Poetaster" are now current.

† Like most idiomatic, as distinguished from correct writers, he knew very little about the language historically or critically. His prose and poetry swarm with locutions that would have made Lindley Murray's hair stand on end. *How* little he knew is plain from his criticising in Ben Jonson the use of *ones* in the plural, of "Though Heaven should speak with all *his* wrath," and *be* "as false English for *are*, though the rhyme hides it." Yet all are good English, and I have found them all in Dryden's own writing! Of his sins against idiom I have a longer list than I have room for. And yet he is one of our highest authorities for *real* English.

than any other man has ever rendered. He says he formed his style upon Tillotson's (Bossuet, on the other hand, formed *his* upon Corneille's); but I rather think he got it at Will's, for its great charm is that it has the various freedom of talk.* In verse, he had a pomp which, excellent in itself, became pompousness in his imitators. But he had nothing of Milton's ear for various rhythm and interwoven harmony. He knew how to give new modulation, sweetness, and force to the pentameter; but in what used to be called pindarics, I am heretic enough to think he generally failed. His so much praised "Alexander's Feast" (in parts of it, at least) has no excuse for its slovenly metre and awkward expression, but that it was written for music. He himself tells us, in the epistle dedicatory to "King Arthur," that the numbers of poetry and vocal music are sometimes so contrary, that in many places I have been obliged to cramp my verses and make them rugged to the reader that they may be harmonious to the hearer." His renowned ode suffered from this constraint, but this is no apology for the vulgarity of conception in too many passages.†

Dryden's conversion to Romanism has been commonly taken for granted as insincere, and has therefore left an abiding stain on his character, though the other mud thrown at him by angry opponents or rivals brushed off so soon as it was dry. But I think his change of faith susceptible of several explanations, none of them in any way discreditable to him. Where Church and State are

* To see what he rescued us from in pedantry on the one hand, and vulgarism on the other, read Feltham and Tom Brown—if you can.

† "Cette ode mise en musique par Purcell (si je ne me trompe), passe en Angleterre pour le chef-d'œuvre de la poësie la plus sublime et la plus variée; et je vous avoue que, comme je sais mieux l'anglais que le grec, j'aime cent fois mieux cette ode que tout Pindare."—VOLTAIRE to M. DE CHABANON, 9 mars 1772.

Dryden would have agreed with Voltaire. When Chief-Justice Marlay, then a young Templar, "congratulated him on having produced the finest and noblest Ode that had ever been written in any language, 'You are right, young gentleman' (replied Dryden), 'a nobler Ode never *was* produced, nor ever *will*.'"—MALONE.

habitually associated, it is natural that minds even of a high order should unconsciously come to regard religion as only a subtler mode of police.* Dryden, conservative by nature, had discovered before Joseph de Maistre, that Protestantism, so long as it justified its name by continuing to be an active principle, was the abettor of Republicanism. I think this is hinted in more than one passage in his preface to "The Hind and Panther." He may very well have preferred Romanism because of its elder claim to authority in all matters of doctrine, but I think he had a deeper reason in the constitution of his own mind. That he was "naturally inclined to scepticism in philosophy," he tells us of himself in the preface to the "Religio Laica"; but he was a sceptic with an imaginative side, and in such characters scepticism and superstition play into each other's hands. This finds a curious illustration in a letter to his sons, written four years before his death: "Towards the latter end of this month, September, Charles will begin to recover his perfect health, according to his Nativity, which, casting it myself, I am sure is true, and all things hitherto have happened accordingly to the very time that I predicted them." Have we forgotten Montaigne's votive offerings at the shrine of Loreto?

Dryden was short of body, inclined to stoutness, and florid of complexion. He is said to have had "a sleepy eye," but was handsome and of a manly carriage. He "was not a very genteel man, he was intimate with none but poetical men.† He was said to be a very good man by all that knew him: he was as plump as Mr.

* This was true of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and still more of Southey, who in some respects was not unlike Dryden.

† Pope's notion of gentility was perhaps expressed in a letter from Lord Cobham to him: "I congratulate you upon the fine weather. 'T is a strange thing that people of condition and men of parts must enjoy it in common with the rest of the world." (Ruffhead's Pope, p. 276, *note*.) His lordship's naïve distinction between people of condition and men of parts is as good as Pope's between genteel and poetical men. I fancy the poet grinning savagely as he read it.

Pitt, of a fresh colour and a down look, and not very conversible." So Pope described him to Spence. He still reigns in literary tradition, as when at Will's his elbow-chair had the best place by the fire in winter, or on the balcony in summer, and when a pinch from his snuff-box made a young author blush with pleasure as would now-a-days a favourable notice in the *Saturday Review*. What gave and secures for him this singular eminence? To put it in a single word, I think that his qualities and faculties were in that rare combination which makes character. This gave *flavour* to whatever he wrote,—a very rare quality.

Was he, then, a great poet? Hardly, in the narrowest definition. But he was a strong thinker who sometimes carried common sense to a height where it catches the light of a diviner air, and warmed reason till it had well-nigh the illuminating property of intuition. Certainly he is not, like Spenser, the poets' poet, but other men have also their rights. Even the Philistine is a man and a brother, and is entirely right so far as he sees. To demand more of him is to be unreasonable. And he sees, among other things, that a man who undertakes to write should first have a meaning perfectly defined to himself, and then should be able to set it forth clearly in the best words. This is precisely Dryden's praise,* and amid the rickety sentiment looming big through misty phrase which marks so much of modern literature, to read him is as bracing as a north-west wind. He blows the mind clear. In ripeness of mind and bluff heartiness of expression, he takes rank with the best. His phrase is always a short-cut to his sense, for his estate was too spacious for him to need that trick of winding the path of his thought about, and planting it out with clumps of epithet, by which the landscape-gardeners of literature give to a paltry half-acre the air of a park. In poetry, to be next-best is, in one sense, to be nothing; and yet to be among the first in any kind of writing, as

* "Nothing is truly sublime," he himself said, "that is not just and proper."

Dryden certainly was, is to be one of a very small company. He had, beyond most, the gift of the right word. And if he does not, like one or two of the greater masters of song, stir our sympathies by that indefinable aroma so magical in arousing the subtile associations of the soul, he has this in common with the few great writers, that the winged seeds of his thought embed themselves in the memory and germinate there. If I could be guilty of the absurdity of recommending to a young man any author on whom to form his style, I should tell him that, next to having something that will not stay unsaid, he could find no safer guide than Dryden.

Cowper, in a letter to Mr. Unwin (5th January 1782), expresses what I think is the common feeling about Dryden, that, with all his defects, he had that indefinable something we call Genius. "But I admire Dryden most [he had been speaking of Pope], who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and a carelessness almost peculiar to himself. His faults are numberless, and so are his beauties. His faults are those of a great man, and his beauties are such (at least sometimes) as Pope with all his touching and retouching could never equal." But, after all, perhaps no man has summed him up so well as John Dennis, one of Pope's typical dunces, a dull man outside of his own sphere, as men are apt to be, but who had some sound notions as a critic, and thus became the object of Pope's fear and therefore of his resentment. Dennis speaks of him as his "departed friend, whom I infinitely esteemed when living for the solidity of his thought, for the spring and the warmth and the beautiful turn of it; for the power and variety and fulness of his harmony; for the purity, the perspicuity, the energy of his expression; and, whenever these great qualities are required, for the pomp and solemnity and majesty of his style."*

* Dennis in a letter to Tonson, 1715.

## *POPE.*

In 1675 Edward Phillips, the elder of Milton's nephews, published his "Theatrum Poetarum." In his Preface and elsewhere there can be little doubt that he reflected the æsthetic principles and literary judgments of his now illustrious uncle, who had died in obscurity the year before.* The great poet who gave to English blank verse the grandeur and compass of organ-music, and who in his minor poems kept alive the traditions of Fletcher and Shakespeare, died with no foretaste, and yet we may believe as confident as ever, of that "immortality of fame" which he tells his friend Diodati he was "meditating with the help of Heaven" in his youth. He who may have seen Shakespeare, who doubtless had seen Fletcher, and who perhaps personally knew Jonson,† lived to see the false school of writers whom he qualified as "good rhymists, but no poets," at once the idols and the victims of the taste they had corrupted. As he saw, not without scorn, how they found universal hearing, while he slowly won his audience, fit though few, did he ever think of the hero of his own epic at the ear of Eve? It is not impossible; but however that may be, he sowed in his nephew's book the dragon's teeth of that long war which, after the lapse of a century and a-half, was to end in the expulsion of the usurping dynasty and the restoration of the ancient and legitimate race whose claim rested on the grace of God. In the following passage surely the voice is Milton's, though the hand be that of Phillips: "Wit, ingenuity, and learning in verse, even elegancy itself, though that comes nearest, are one thing; true native poetry is another, in which there is a certain air and spirit, which, perhaps, the most learned and judicious in other arts do not perfectly apprehend; much less is it attainable by

* This was Thomas Warton's opinion.

† Milton, a London boy, was in his eighth, seventeenth, and twenty-ninth years, respectively, when Shakespeare (1616), Fletcher (1625), and B. Jonson (1637) died.

any art or study." The man who speaks of elegancy as coming nearest, certainly shared, if he was not repeating, the opinions of him who thirty years before had said that "decorum" (meaning a higher or organic unity) was "the grand masterpiece to observe" in poetry.*

It is upon this text of Phillips (as Chalmers has remarked) that Joseph Warton bases his classification of poets in the dedication to Young of the first volume of his essay on the "Genius and Writings of Pope," published in 1756. That was the earliest public and official declaration of war against the reigning mode, though private hostilities and reprisals had been going on for some time. Addison's panegyric of Milton in the "Spectator" was a criticism, not the less damaging because indirect, of the superficial poetry then in vogue. His praise of the old ballads condemned by innuendo the artificial elaboration of the drawing-room pastoral by contrasting it with the simple sincerity of nature. Himself incapable of being natural except in prose, he had an instinct for the genuine virtues of poetry as sure as that of Gray. Thomson's "Winter" (1726) was a direct protest against the literature of Good Society, going as it did to prove that the noblest society was that of one's own mind, heightened by the contemplation of outward nature. What Thomson's poetical creed was may be surely inferred from his having modelled his two principal poems on Milton and Spenser, ignoring rhyme altogether in the "Seasons," and in the "Castle of Indolence" rejecting the stiff mould of the couplet. In 1744 came Akenside's "Pleasures of Imagination," whose very title, like a guide-post, points away from the level highway of commonplace to mountain-paths and less domestic prospects. The poem was stiff and unwilling, but in its loins lay the seed of nobler births, and without it the "Lines written at Tintern Abbey" might never have been. Three years later Collins printed his little volume of Odes, advocating in theory and exemplifying in practice the natural supremacy of the imagination (though he called it by its older name of fancy) as a

* In his Tractate on Education.

test to distinguish poetry from verse-making. The whole Romantic School, in its germ, no doubt, but yet unmistakably foreshadowed, lies already in the "Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands." He was the first to bring back into poetry something of the antique fervour, and found again the long-lost secret of being classically elegant without being pedantically cold. A skilled lover of music,* he rose from the general sing-song of his generation to a harmony that had been silent since Milton, and in him, to use his own words,

> "The force of energy is found,
> And the sense rises on the wings of sound."

But beside his own direct services in the reformation of our poetry, we owe him a still greater debt as the inspirer of Gray, whose "Progress of Poesy," in reach, variety, and loftiness of poise, overflies all other English lyrics like an eagle. In spite of the dulness of contemporary ears, preoccupied with the continuous hum of the popular hurdy-gurdy, it was the prevailing blast of Gray's trumpet that more than anything else called men back to the legitimate standard.† Another poet, Dyer, whose "Fleece" was

* Milton, Collins, and Gray, our three great masters of harmony, were all musicians.

† Wordsworth, who recognised forerunners in Thomson, Collins, Dyer, and Burns, and who chimes in with the popular superstition about Chatterton, is always somewhat niggardly in his appreciation of Gray. Yet he owed him not a little. Without Gray's tune in his ears, his own noblest Ode would have missed the varied modulation which is one of its main charms. Where he forgets Gray, his verse sinks to something like the measure of a jig. Perhaps the suggestion of one of his own finest lines,

("The light that never was on land or sea,")

was due to Gray's

"Orient hues unborrowed of the sun."

I believe it has not been noticed that among the verses in Gray's "Sonnet on the Death of West," which Wordsworth condemns as of no value, the second—

"And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fires"—

is one of Gray's happy reminiscences from a poet in some respects greater than either of them:—

published in 1753, both in the choice of his subject and his treatment of it gives further proof of the tendency among the younger generation to revert to simpler and purer models. Plainly enough, Thomson had been his chief model, though there are also traces of a careful study of Milton.

Pope had died in 1744, at the height of his renown, the acknowledged monarch of letters, as supreme as Voltaire when the excitement and exposure of his coronation ceremonies at Paris hastened his end a generation later. His fame, like Voltaire's, was European, and the style which he had carried to perfection was paramount throughout the cultivated world. The new edition of the "Dunciad," with the Fourth Book added, published the year before his death, though the substitution of Cibber for Theobald made the poem incoherent, had yet increased his reputation and confirmed the sway of the school whose recognised head he was, by the poignancy of its satire, the lucidity of its wit, and the resounding, if somewat uniform march, of its numbers. He had been translated into other languages living and dead. Voltaire had long before pronounced him "the best poet of England, and at present of all the world."* It was the apotheosis of clearness, point, and

"Jamque *rubrum* tremulis jubar *ignibus erigere alte*
Cum cœptat natura."—*Lucret.* iv. 404, 405.

Gray's taste was a sensitive divining-rod of the sources whether of pleasing or profound emotion in poetry. Though he prized pomp, he did not undervalue simplicity of subject or treatment, if only the witch Imagination had cast her spell there. Wordsworth loved solitude in his appreciations as well as in his daily life, and was the readier to find merit in obscurity, because it gave him the pleasure of being a first discoverer all by himself. Thus he addresses a sonnet to John Dyer. But Gray was one of "the pure and powerful minds" who had discovered Dyer during his lifetime, when the discovery of poets is more difficult. In 1753 he writes to Walpole—"Mr. Dyer has more poetry in his imagination than almost any of our number, but rough and injudicious." Dyer has one fine verse—

"On the dark level of adversity."

* MS. letter of Voltaire, cited by Warburton in his edition of Pope, vol. iv. p. 38, note. The date is 15th October 1726. I do not find it in Voltaire's Correspondence.

technical skill, of the ease that comes of practice, not of the fulness of original power. And yet, as we have seen, while he was in the very plenitude of his power, there was already a widespread discontent, a feeling that what "comes nearest," as Phillips calls it, may yet be infinitely far from giving those profounder and incalculable satisfactions of which the soul is capable in poetry. A movement was gathering strength which prompted

> "The age to quit their clogs
> By the known rules of virtuous liberty."

Nor was it wholly confined to England. Symptoms of a similar reaction began to show themselves on the Continent, notably in the translation of Milton (1732) and the publication of the "Nibelungen Lied" (1757) by Bodmer, and the imitations of Thomson in France. Was it possible, then, that there was anything better than good sense, elegant diction, and the highest polish of style? Could there be an intellectual appetite which antithesis failed to satisfy? If the horse would only have faith enough in his green spectacles, surely the straw would acquire, not only the flavour, but the nutritious properties of fresh grass. The horse was foolish enough to starve, but the public is wiser. It is surprising how patiently it will go on, for generation after generation, transmuting dry stubble into verdure in this fashion.

The school which Boileau founded was critical and not creative. It was limited, not only in its essence, but by the capabilities of the French language and by the natural bent of the French mind, which finds a predominant satisfaction in phrases if elegantly turned, and can make a despotism, political or æsthetic, palatable with the pepper of epigram. The style of Louis XIV. did what his armies failed to do. It overran and subjugated Europe. It struck the literature of imagination with palsy, and it is droll enough to see Voltaire, after he had got some knowledge of Shakespeare, continually endeavouring to reassure himself about the poetry of the *grand siècle*, and all the time

asking himself, "Why, in the name of all the gods at once, is this *not* the real thing?" He seems to have felt that there was a dreadful mistake somewhere, when poetry must be called upon to prove itself inspired, above all when it must demonstrate that it is interesting, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Difficulty, according to Voltaire, is the tenth Muse; but how if there were difficulty in reading as well as writing? It was something, at any rate, which an increasing number of persons were perverse enough to feel in attempting the productions of a pseudo-classicism, the classicism of red heels and periwigs. Even poor old Dennis himself had arrived at a kind of muddled notion that artifice was not precisely art, that there were depths in human nature which the most perfectly manufactured line of five feet could not sound, and passionate elations that could not be tuned to the lullaby seesaw of the couplet. The satisfactions of a conventional taste were very well in their own way, but were they, after all, the highest of which men were capable who had obscurely divined the Greeks, and who had seen Hamlet, Lear, and Othello upon the stage? Was not poetry, then, something which delivered us from the dungeon of actual life, instead of basely reconciling us with it?

A century earlier the school of the *cultists* had established a dominion ephemeral, as it soon appeared, but absolute while it lasted. Du Bartas, who may, perhaps, as fairly as any, lay claim to its paternity,* had been called divine, and similar honours had been paid in turn to Gongora, Lilly, and Marini, who were in the strictest sense contemporaneous. The infection of mere fashion will hardly account satisfactorily for a vogue so sudden and so widely extended. It may well be suspected that there was some latent cause, something at work more potent than the fascinating mannerism of any single author in the rapid and almost

* Its taste for verbal affectations is to be found in the *Roman de la Rose*, and (yet more absurdly forced) in Gauthier de Coinsy; but in Du Bartas the research of effect not seldom subjugates the thought as well as the phrase.

simultaneous diffusion of this purely cutaneous eruption. It is not improbable that, in the revival of letters, men whose native tongues had not yet attained the precision and grace only to be acquired by long literary usage, should have learned from a study of the Latin poets to value the form above the substance, and to seek in mere words a conjuring property which belongs to them only when they catch life and meaning from profound thought or powerful emotion. Yet this very devotion to expression at the expense of everything else, though its excesses were fatal to the innovators who preached and practised it, may not have been without good results in refining language and fitting it for the higher uses to which it was destined. The *cultists* went down before the implacable good sense of French criticism, but the defect of this criticism was that it ignored imagination altogether, and sent Nature about her business as an impertinent baggage whose household loom competed unlawfully with the machine-made fabrics, so exquisitely uniform in pattern, of the royal manufactories. There is more than a fanciful analogy between the style which Pope brought into vogue and that which for a time bewitched all ears in the latter half of the sixteenth century. As the master had made it an axiom to avoid what was mean or low, so the disciples endeavoured to escape from what was common. This they contrived by the ready expedient of the periphrasis. They called everything something else. A boot with them was

> "The shining leather that encased the limb;"

coffee became

> "The fragrant juice of Mocha's berry brown;"

and they were as liberal of epithets as a royal christening of proper names. Two in every verse, one to balance the other, was the smallest allowance. Here are four successive verses from "The Vanity of Human Wishes:"—

> "The *encumbered* oar scarce leaves the *dreaded* coast,
> Through *purple* billows and a *floating* host.
> The *bold* Bavarian in a *luckless* hour
> Tries the *dread* summits of *Cæsarian* power."

This fashion perished also by its own excess, but the criticism which laid at the door of the master all the faults of his pupils was unjust. It was defective, moreover, in overlooking how much of what we call natural is an artificial product, above all in forgetting that Pope had one of the prime qualities of a great poet in exactly answering the intellectual needs of the age in which he lived, and in reflecting its lineaments. He did in some not inadequate sense hold the mirror up to nature. His poetry is not a mountain-tarn, like that of Wordsworth; it is not in sympathy with the higher moods of the mind; yet it continues entertaining, in spite of all changes of mode. It was a mirror in a drawing-room, but it gave back a faithful image of society, powdered and rouged, to be sure, and intent on trifles, yet still as human in its own way as the heroes of Homer in theirs.

For the popularity of Pope, as for that of Marini and his sect, circumstances had prepared the way. English literature for half a century after the Restoration showed the marks both of a moral reaction and of an artistic vassalage to France. From the compulsory saintship and cropped hair of the Puritans men rushed or sneaked, as their temperaments dictated, to the opposite cant of sensuality and a wilderness of periwig. Charles II. had brought back with him from exile French manners, French morals, and above all, French taste. Misfortune makes a shallow mind sceptical. It had made the king so; and this, at a time when court patronage was the main sinew of authorship, was fatal to the higher qualities of literature. That Charles should have preferred the stately decorums of the French school, and should have mistaken its polished mannerism for style, was natural enough. But there was something also in the texture of the average British mind which prepared it for this subjugation from the other side of the Channel. No observer of men can have failed to notice the clumsy respect which the understanding pays to elegance of manner and *savoir-faire*, nor what an awkward sense of inferiority it feels in the presence of an accomplished worldliness. The

code of society is stronger with most persons than that of Sinai, and many a man who would not scruple to thrust his fingers in his neighbour's pocket would forego green peas rather than use his knife as a shovel. The submission with which the greater number surrender their natural likings for the acquired taste of what for the moment is called the World is a highly curious phenomenon, and, however destructive of originality, is the main safeguard of society and nurse of civility. Anyone who has witnessed the torments of an honest citizen in a foreign gallery before some hideous martyrdom which he feels it his duty to admire, though it be hateful to him as nightmare, may well doubt whether the gridiron of the saint were hotter than that of the sinner. It is only a great mind or a strong character that knows how to respect its own provincialism and can dare to be in fashion with itself. The bewildered clown with his "Am I Giles? or am I not?" was but a type of the average man who finds himself uniformed, drilled, and keeping step, whether he will or no, with the company into which destiny or chance has drafted him, and which is marching him inexorably away from everything that made him comfortable.

The insularity of England, while it fostered pride and reserve, entailed also that sensitiveness to ridicule which haunts pride like an evil genius. "The English," says Barclay, writing half a century before the Restoration, "have for the most part grave minds, and withdrawn, as it were, into themselves for counsel; they wonderfully admire themselves and the manners, genius, and spirit of their own nation. In salutation or in writing they endure not (unless haply imbued with foreign manners) to descend to those words of imaginary servitude which the refinement (*blandities*) of ages hath invented."* Yet their fondness of foreign fashions had long been the butt of native satirists. Everyone remembers Portia's merry picture of the English lord: "How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in

* *Barclaii Satyricon*, p. 382. Barclay had lived in France.

France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere." But while she laughs at his bungling efforts to make himself a cosmopolite in externals, she hints at the persistency of his inward Anglicism: "He hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian." In matters of taste the Anglo-Saxon mind seems always to have felt a painful distrust of itself, which it betrays either in an affectation of burly contempt or in a pretence of admiration equally insincere. The young lords who were to make the future court of Charles II. no doubt found in Paris an elegance beside which the homely bluntness of native manners seemed rustic and underbred. They frequented a theatre where propriety was absolute upon the stage, though license had its full swing behind the scenes. They brought home with them to England debauched morals and that urbane discipline of manners which is so agreeable a substitute for discipline of mind. The word "genteel" came back with them, an outward symptom of the inward change. In the last generation, the men whose aim was success in the Other World had wrought a political revolution; now, those whose ideal was prosperity in This World were to have their turn and to accomplish with their lighter weapons as great a change. Before the end of the seventeenth century John Bull was pretty well persuaded, in a bewildered kind of way, that he had been vulgar, and especially that his efforts in literature showed marks of native vigour, indeed, but of a vigour clownish and uncouth. He began to be ashamed of the provincialism which had given strength, if also something of limitation, to his character.

Waller, who spent a whole summer in polishing the life out of ten lines to be written in the Tasso of the Duchess of York, expresses the prevailing belief as regarded poetry in the prologue to his "improvement" of the "Maid's Tragedy" of Beaumont and Fletcher. He made the play *reasonable*, as it was called, and there is a pleasant satire in the fact that it was refused a license because there was an immoral king in it. On the throne, to be sure—but on the stage! Forbid it, decency!

> " Above our neighbours' our conceptions are,
> But faultless writing is the effect of care ;
> Our lines reformed, and not composed in haste,
> Polished like marble, would like marble last.
> . . . . . .
> Were we but less indulgent to our fau'ts,
> And patience had to cultivate our thoughts,
> Our Muse would flourish, and a nobler rage
> Would honour this than did the Grecian stage."

It is a curious comment on these verses in favour of careful writing, that Waller should have failed even to express his own meaning either clearly or with propriety. He talks of "cultivating our thoughts," when he means "pruning our style;" he confounds the Muse with the laurel, or at any rate makes her a plant, and then goes on with perfect equanimity to tell us that a nobler "rage" (that is madness) than that of Greece would follow the horticultural devices he recommends. It never seems to have occurred to Waller that it is the substance of what you polish, and not the polish itself, that insures duration. Dryden, in his rough-and-ready way, has hinted at this in his verses to Congreve on the "Double Dealer." He begins by stating the received theory about the improvement of English literature under the new *régime*, but the thin ice of sophistry over which Waller had glided smoothly gives way under his greater weight, and he finds himself in deep water ere he is aware.

> " Well, then, the promised hour has come at last,
> The present age in wit obscures the past ;
> Strong were our sires, and as they fought they writ,
> Conquering with force of arm* and dint of wit.
> Theirs was the giant race before the Flood ;
> And thus when Charles returned our Empire stood ;
> Like Janus he the stubborn soil manured,
> With rules of husbandry the rankness cured,
> Tamed us to manners when the stage was rude,
> And boisterous English wit with art endued ;

* Usually printed *arms*, but Dryden certainly wrote *arm*, to correspond with *dint*, which he used in its old meaning of a downright blow.

> Our age was cultivated thus at length,
> But what we gained in skill we lost in strength ;
> Our builders were with want of genius curst,
> The second temple was not like the first."

There would seem to be a manifest reminiscence of Waller's verse in the half-scornful emphasis which Dryden lays on "cultivated." Perhaps he was at first led to give greater weight to correctness and to the restraint of arbitrary rules from a consciousness that he had a tendency to hyperbole and extravagance. But he afterwards became convinced that the heightening of discourse by passion was a very different thing from the exaggeration which heaps phrase on phrase, and that genius, like beauty, can always plead its privilege. Dryden, by his powerful example, by the charm of his verse, which combines vigour and fluency in a measure perhaps never reached by any other of our poets, and above all, because it is never long before the sunshine of his cheerful good sense breaks through the clouds of rhetoric, and gilds the clipped hedges over which his thought clambers like an unpruned vine—Dryden, one of the most truly English of English authors, did more than all others combined to bring about the triumphs of French standards in taste and French principles in criticism. But he was always like a deserter who cannot feel happy in the victories of the alien arms, and who would go back if he could to the camp where he naturally belonged. Between 1660 and 1700 more French words, I believe, were directly transplanted into our language than in the century and a-half since. What was of more consequence, French ideas came with them, shaping the form, and through that modifying the spirit, of our literature.

Voltaire, though he came later, was steeped in the theories of art which had been inherited as traditions of classicism from the preceding generation. He had lived in England, and, I have no doubt, gives us a very good notion of the tone which was prevalent there in his time, an English version of the criticism imported from France. He tells us that Mr. Addison was the first Englishman who had

written *reasonable* tragedy. And in spite of the growling of poor old Dennis, whose sandy pedantry was not without an oasis of refreshing sound judgment here and there, this was the opinion of most persons at that day, except, it may be suspected, the judicious and modest Mr. Addison himself. Voltaire says of the English tragedians—and it will be noticed that he is only putting, in another way, the opinion of Dryden—"Their productions, almost all barbarous, without polish, order, or probability, have astonishing gleams in the midst of their night; . . . is seems sometimes that nature is not made in England as it is elsewhere." *Eh bien*, the inference is that we must try and make it so! The world must be uniform in order to be comfortable, and what fashion so becoming as the one we have invented in Paris? It is not a little amusing that when Voltaire played master of ceremonies to introduce the *bizarre* Shakespeare among his countrymen, that other kind of nature made a profounder impression on them than quite pleased him. So he turned about presently and called his whilome *protégé* a buffoon.

The condition of the English mind at the close of the seventeenth century was such as to make it particularly sensitive to the magnetism which streamed to it from Paris. The loyalty of everybody, both in politics and religion, had been put out of joint. A generation of materialists, by the natural rebound which inevitably follows over-tension, was to balance the ultra-spiritualism of the Puritans. As always when a political revolution has been wrought by moral agencies, the plunder had fallen mainly to the share of the greedy, selfish, and unscrupulous, whose disgusting cant had given a taint of hypocrisy to piety itself. Religion, from a burning conviction of the soul, had grown to be with both parties a political badge, as little typical of the inward man as the scallop of a pilgrim. Sincerity is impossible, unless it pervade the whole being, and the pretence of it saps the very foundation of character. There seems to have been an universal scepticism, and in its worst form, that is, with an outward conformity in the interest of decorum and

order. There was an unbelief that did not believe even in itself.

The difference between the leading minds of the former age and that which was supplanting it went to the very roots of the soul. Milton was willing to peril the success of his crowning work by making the poetry of it a stalking-horse for his theological convictions. What was that Fame,

> "Which the clear spirit doth raise
> To scorn delights and live laborious days,"

to the crown of a good preacher who sets

> "The hearts of men on fire
> To scorn the sordid world and unto heaven aspire?"

Dean Swift, who aspired to the mitre, could write a book whose moral, if it had any, was that one religion was as good as another, since all were political devices, and accepted a cure of souls when it was more than doubtful whether he believed that his follow-creatures had any souls to be saved, or, if they had, whether they were worth saving. The answer which Pulci's Margutte makes to Morgante, when he asked if he believed in Christ or Mahomet, would have expressed well enough the creed of the majority of that generation :—

> "To tell thee truly,
> My faith in black 's no greater than in azure,
> But I believe in capons, roast-meat, bouilli,
> And in good wine my faith's beyond all measure."*

It was a carnival of intellect without faith, when men could be Protestant or Catholic, both at once, or by turns, or neither, as suited their interest, when they could swear one allegiance and keep on safe terms with the other, when prime ministers and commanders-in-chief could be intelligencers of the Pretender, nay, when even Algernon Sidney himself could be a pensioner of France. What morality there was, was the morality of appearances, of the side that is turned toward men and not toward God. The very shamelessness of Congreve is refreshing in that age of sham.

* Morgante xviii. 115.

It was impossible that anything truly great, that is, great on the moral and emotional as well as the intellectual side, should be produced by such a generation. But something intellectually great could be and was. The French mind, always stronger in perceptive and analytic than in imaginative qualities, loving precision, grace, and finesse, prone to attribute an almost magical power to the scientific regulation whether of politics or religion, had brought wit and fancy and the elegant arts of society to as great perfection as was possible by the *à priori* method. Its ideal in literature was to conjure passion within the magic circle of courtliness, or to combine the appearance of careless ease and gaiety of thought with intellectual exactness of statement. The eternal watchfulness of a wit that never slept had made it distrustful of the natural emotions and the unconventional expression of them, and its first question about a sentiment was, Will it be *safe?* about a phrase, Will it pass with the Academy? The effect of its example on English literature would appear chiefly in neatness and facility of turn, in point and epigrammatic compactness of phrase, and these in conveying conventional sentiments and emotions, in appealing to good society rather than to human nature. Its influence would be greatest where its success had been most marked, in what was called moral poetry, whose chosen province was manners, and in which satire, with its avenging scourge, took the place of that profounder art whose office it was to purify, not the manners, but the source of them in the soul, by pity and terror. The mistake of the whole school of French criticism, it seems to me, lay in its tendency to confound what was common with what was vulgar, in a too exclusive deference to authority at the expense of all free movement of the mind.

There are certain defects of taste which correct themselves by their own extravagance. Language, I suspect, is more apt to be reformed by the charm of some master of it, like Milton, than by any amount of precept. The influence of second-rate writers for evil is at best ephemeral, for true

style, the joint result of culture and natural aptitude, is always in fashion, as fine manners always are, in whatever clothes. Perhaps some reform was needed when Quarles, who had no mean gift of poesy, could write,

> "My passion has no April in her eyes:
> I cannot spend in mists; I cannot mizzle;
> My fluent brains are too severe to drizzle
> Slight drops."*

Good taste is an excellent thing when it confines itself to its own rightful province of the proprieties, but when it attempts to correct those profound instincts out of whose judgments the higher principles of æsthetics have been formulated, its success is a disaster. During the era when the French theory of poetry was supreme, we notice a decline from imagination to fancy, from passion to wit, from metaphor, which fuses image and thought in one, to simile, which sets one beside the other, from the supreme code of the natural sympathies to the parochial by-laws of etiquette. The imagination instinctively Platonises, and it is the essence of poetry that it should be unconventional, that the soul of it should subordinate the outward parts; while the artificial method proceeds from a principle the reverse of this, making the spirit lackey the form.

Waller preaches up this new doctrine in the epilogue to the "Maid's Tragedy":—

> "Nor is't less strange such mighty wits as those
> Should use a style in tragedy like prose;
> Well-sounding verse, where princes tread the stage
> Should speak their virtue and describe their rage."

That it should be beneath the dignity of princes to speak in

* Elegie on Doctor Wilson. But if Quarles had been led astray by the vices of Donne's manner, he had good company in Herbert and Vaughan. In common with them, too, he had that luck of simpleness which is even more delightful than wit. In the same poem he says,—

> "Go, glorious soul, and lay thy temples down
> In Abram's bosom, *in the sacred down*
> *Of soft eternity.*"

anything but rhyme can only be paralleled by Mr. Puff's law that a heroine can go decorously mad only in white satin. Waller, I suppose, though with so loose a thinker one cannot be positive, uses "describe" in its Latin sense of limitation. Fancy Othello or Lear confined to this go-cart! Phillips touches the true point when he says, "And the truth is, the use of measure alone, without any rime at all, would give more scope and liberty both to style and fancy than can possibly be observed in rime,"* But let us test Waller's method by an example or two. His monarch made *reasonable*, thus discourses :—

> "Courage our greatest failings does supply,
> And makes all good, or handsomely we die.
> Life is a thing of common use; by heaven
> As well to insects as to monarchs given;
> But for the crown, 'tis a more sacred thing;
> I'll dying lose it, or I'll live a king.
> Come, Diphilus, we must together walk
> And of a matter of importance talk." [*Exeunt.*

Blank verse, where the sentiment is trivial as here, merely removes prose to a proper ideal distance, where it is in keeping with more impassioned parts, but commonplace set to this rocking-horse jog irritates the nerves. There is nothing here to remind us of the older tragic style but the *exeunt* at the close. Its pithy conciseness and the relief which it brings us from his majesty's prosing give it an almost poetical savour. Aspatia's reflections upon suicide (or "suppressing our breath," as she calls it), in the play, will make few readers regret that Shakespeare was left to his own unassisted barbarism when he wrote Hamlet's soliloquy on the same topic: —

> "'Twas in compassion of our woe
> That nature first made poisons grow,
> For hopeless wretches such as I
> Kindly providing means to die:
> As mothers do their children keep,
> So Nature feeds and makes us sleep.
> The indisposed she does invite
> To go to bed before 'tis night."

* Preface to the *Theatrum.*

Correctness in this case is but a synonyme of monotony, and words are chosen for the number of their syllables, for their rubbishy value to fill-in, instead of being forced upon the poet by the meaning which occupies the mind. Language becomes useful for its diluting properties, rather than as the medium by means of which the thought or fancy precipitate themselves in crystals upon a connecting thread of purpose. Let us read a few verses from Beaumont and Fletcher, that we may feel fully the difference between the rude and the reformed styles. This also shall be a speech of Aspatia's. Antiphila, one of her maidens, is working the story of Theseus and Ariadne in tapestry, for the older masters loved a picturesque background and knew the value of fanciful accessaries. Aspatia thinks the face of Ariadne not sad enough:—

> "Do it by me,
> Do it again by me, the lost Aspatia,
> And you shall find all true but the wild island.
> Suppose I stand upon the seabeach now,
> Mine arms thus, and my hair blown with the wind,
> Wild as that desert; and let all about me
> Be teacher of my story. Do my face
> (If ever thou hadst feeling of a sorrow)
> Thus, thus, Antiphila; strive to make me look
> Like sorrow's monument; and the trees about me
> Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks
> Groan with continual surges; and behind me
> Make all a desolation."

What instinctive felicity of versification! what sobbing breaks and passionate repetitions are here!

We see what the direction of the new tendency was, but it would be an inadequate or a dishonest criticism that should hold Pope responsible for the narrow compass of the instrument which was his legacy from his immediate predecessors, any more than for the wearisome thrumming-over of his tune by those who came after him and who had caught his technical skill without his genius. The question properly stated is, How much was it possible to make of the material supplied by the age in which he lived? and how much did he make of it? Thus far, among the great English

poets who preceded him, we have seen actual life represented by Chaucer, imaginative life by Spenser, ideal life by Shakespeare, the interior life by Milton. But as everything aspires to a rhythmical utterance of itself, so conventional life, a new phenomenon, was waiting for its poet. It found or made a most fitting one in Pope. He stands for exactness of intellectual expression, for perfect propriety of phrase (I speak of him at his best), and is a striking instance how much success and permanence of reputation depend on conscientious finish as well as on native endowment. Butler asks—

> "Then why should those who pick and choose
> The best of all the best compose,
> And join it by Mosaic art,
> In graceful order, part to part,
> To make the whole in beauty suit,
> Not merit as complete repute
> As those who, with less art and pain,
> Can do it with their native brain?"

Butler knew very well that precisely what stamps a man as an artist is this power of finding out what *is* "the best of all the best."

I confess that I come to the treatment of Pope with diffidence. I was brought up in the old superstition that he was the greatest poet that ever lived; and when I came to find that I had instincts of my own, and my mind was brought in contact with the apostles of a more esoteric doctrine of poetry, I felt that ardent desire for smashing the idols I had been brought up to worship, without any regard to their artistic beauty, which characterises youthful zeal. What was it to me that Pope was called a master of style? I felt, as Addison says in his Freeholder when answering an argument in favour of the Pretender because he could speak English and George I. could not, "that I did not wish to be tyrannised over in the best English that ever was spoken." The young demand thoughts that find an echo in their real and not their acquired nature, and care very little about the dress they are put in. It is later that we learn to like the conventional, as we do olives. There was a time when I

could not read Pope, but disliked him on principle as Old Roger Ascham seems to have felt about Italy, when he says, "I was once in Italy myself, but I thank God my abode there was only nine days."

But Pope fills a very important place in the history of English poetry, and must be studied by everyone who would come to a clear knowledge of it. I have since read over every line that Pope ever wrote, and every letter written by or to him, and that more than once. If I have not come to the conclusion that he is the greatest of poets, I believe that I am at least in a condition to allow him every merit that is fairly his. I have said that Pope as a literary man represents precision and grace of expression; but as a poet he represents something more,—nothing less, namely, than one of those eternal controversies of taste which will last as long as the imagination and understanding divide men between them. It is not a matter to be settled by any amount of argument or demonstration. There are born Popists or Wordsworthians, Lockists or Kantists, and there is nothing more to be said of the matter.

Wordsworth was not in a condition to do Pope justice. A man brought up in sublime mountain solitudes, and whose nature was a solitude more vast than they, walking an earth which quivered with the throe of the French Revolution, the child of an era of profound mental and moral movement, it could not be expected that he should be in sympathy with the poet of artificial life. Moreover, he was the apostle of imagination, and came at a time when the school which Pope founded had degenerated into a mob of mannerists who wrote with ease, and who with their congenial critics united at once to decry poetry which brought in the dangerous innovation of having a soul in it.

But however it may be with poets, it is very certain that a reader is happiest whose mind is broad enough to enjoy the natural school for its nature, and the artificial for its artificiality, provided they be only good of their kind. At any rate, we must allow that the man who can produce one perfect work is either a great genius or a very lucky one;

and so far as we who read are concerned, it is of secondary importance which. And Pope has done this in the "Rape of the Lock." For wit, fancy, invention, and keeping, it has never been surpassed. I do not say there is in it poetry of the highest order, or that Pope is a poet whom anyone would choose as the companion of his best hours. There is no inspiration in it, no trumpet-call, but for pure entertainment it is unmatched. There are two kinds of genius. The first and highest may be said to speak out of the eternal to the present, and must compel its age to understand *it;* the second understands its age, and tells it what it wishes to be told. Let us find strength and inspiration in the one, amusement and instruction in the other, and be honestly thankful for both.

The very earliest of Pope's productions gave indications of that sense and discretion, as well as wit, which afterwards so eminently distinguished him. The facility of expression is remarkable, and we find also that perfect balance of metre, which he afterwards carried so far as to be wearisome. His pastorals were written in his sixteenth year, and their publication immediately brought him into notice. The following four verses from his first pastoral are quite characteristic in their antithetic balance :—

> "You that, too wise for pride, too good for power,
> Enjoy the glory to be great no more,
> And carrying with you all the world can boast,
> To all the world illustriously are lost!"

The sentiment is affected, and reminds one of that future period of Pope's Correspondence with his Friends, when Swift, his heart corroding with disappointed ambition at Dublin, Bolingbroke raising delusive turnips at his farm, and Pope pretending not to feel the lampoons which imbittered his life, played together the solemn farce of affecting indifference to the world by which it would have agonised them to be forgotten, and wrote letters addressed to each other, but really intended for that posterity whose opinion they assumed to despise.

In these pastorals there is an entire want of nature. For example, in that on the death of Mrs. Tempest :—

> " Her fate is whispered by the gentle breeze
> And told in sighs to all the trembling trees ;
> The trembling trees, in every plain and wood,
> Her fate remurmur to the silver flood ;
> The silver flood, so lately calm, appears
> Swelled with new passion, and o'erflows with tears ;
> The winds and trees and floods her death deplore—
> Daphne, our grief ! our glory now no more ! "

All this is as perfectly professional as the mourning of an undertaker. Still worse, Pope materialises and makes too palpably objective that sympathy which our grief forces upon outward nature. Milton, before making the echoes mourn for Lycidas, puts our feelings in tune, as it were, and hints at his own imagination as the source of this emotion in inanimate things,—

> " But, O the heavy change now thou are gone ! "

In " Windsor Forest " we find the same thing again :—

> " Here his first lays majestic Denham sung,
> There the last numbers flowed from Cowley's tongue ;
> O early lost, what tears the river shed
> When the sad pomp along his banks was led !
> His drooping swans on every note expire,
> And on his willows hung each muse's lyre ! "

In the same poem he indulges the absurd conceit that,

> " Beasts urged by us, their fellow-beasts pursue,
> And learn of man each other to undo ; "

and in the succeeding verses gives some striking instances of that artificial diction, so inappropriate to poems descriptive of natural objects and ordinary life, which brought verse-making to such a depth of absurdity in the course of the century.

> " With slaughtering guns, the unwearied fowler roves
> Where frosts have whitened all the naked groves ;
> Where doves in flocks the leafless trees o'ershade,
> And lonely woodcocks haunt the watery glade ;

He lifts the tube and levels with his eye,
Straight a short thunder breaks the frozen sky:
Oft as in airy rings they skim the heath,
The clamorous lapwings feel the leaden death;
Oft as the mounting larks their notes prepare,
They fall and leave their little lives in air."

Now one would imagine that the *tube* of the fowler was a telescope instead of a gun. And think of the larks preparing their notes like a country choir! Yet even here there are admirable lines—

"Oft as in airy rings they skim the heath,"

"They fall and leave their little lives in air,"

for example.

In Pope's next poem, the "Essay on Criticism," the wit and poet become apparent. It is full of clear thoughts, compactly expressed. In this poem, written when Pope was only twenty-one, occur some of those lines which have become proverbial, such as—

"A little learning is a dangerous thing;"

"For fools rush in where angels fear to tread;"

"True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed."

"For each ill author is as bad a friend."

In all of these we notice that terseness in which (regard being had to his especial range of thought) Pope has never been equalled. One cannot help being struck also with the singular *discretion* which the poem gives evidence of. I do not know where to look for another author in whom it appeared so early, and, considering the vivacity of his mind and the constantly besetting temptation of his wit, it is still more wonderful. In his boyish correspondence with poor old Wycherley, one would suppose him to be the man and Wycherley the youth. Pope's understanding was no less vigorous (when not the dupe of his nerves) than his fancy was lightsome and sprightly.

I come now to what in itself would be enough to have immortalised him as a poet, the "Rape of the Lock," in

which, indeed, he appears more purely as poet than in any other of his productions. Elsewhere he has shown more force, more wit, more reach of thought, but nowhere such a truly artistic combination of elegance and fancy. His genius has here found its true direction, and the very same artificiality, which in his pastorals was unpleasing, heightens the effect, and adds to the general keeping. As truly as Shakespeare is the poet of man, as God made him, dealing with great passions and innate motives, so truly is Pope the poet of society, the delineator of manners, the exposer of those motives which may be called *acquired*, whose spring is in institutions and habits of purely worldly origin.

The "Rape of the Lock" was written in Pope's twenty-fourth year, and the machinery of the Sylphs was added at the suggestion of Dr. Garth—a circumstance for which we can feel a more unmixed gratitude to him than for writing the "Dispensary." The idea was taken from that entertaining book, "The Count de Gabalis," in which Fouquè afterwards found the hint for his "Undine;" but the little sprites as they appear in the poem are purely the creation of Pope's fancy.

The theory of the poem is excellent. The heroic is out of the question in fine society. It is perfectly true that almost every door we pass in the street closes upon its private tragedy, but the moment a *great* passion enters a man he passes at once out of the artificial into the human. So long as he continues artificial, the sublime is a conscious absurdity to him. The mock-heroic then is the only way in which the petty actions and sufferings of the fine world can be epically treated, and the contrasts continually suggested with subjects of larger scope and more dignified treatment, makes no small part of the pleasure and sharpens the point of the wit. The invocation is admirable:—

> "Say, what strange motive, Goddess, could compel
> A well-bred lord to assault a gentle belle?
> O say what stranger cause, yet unexplored,
> Could make a gentle belle reject a lord?"

The keynote of the poem is here struck, and we are able to put ourselves in tune with it. It is not a parody of the heroic style, but only a setting it in satirical juxtaposition with cares and events and modes of thought with which it is in comical antipathy, and while *it* is not degraded, *they* are shown in their triviality. The "clouded cane," as compared with the Homeric spear, indicates the difference of scale, the lower plane of emotions and passions. The opening of the action, too, is equally good:—

> "Sol through white curtains shot a timorous ray,
> And oped those eyes that must eclipse the day,
> Now lapdogs give themselves the rousing shake,
> And sleepless lovers just at twelve awake;
> Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knocked the ground,
> And the pressed watch returned a silver sound."

The mythology of the Sylphs is full of the most fanciful wit; indeed, wit infused with fancy is Pope's peculiar merit. The Sylph is addressing Belinda:—

> "Know, then, unnumbered spirits round thee fly,
> The light militia of the lower sky;
> These, though unseen, are ever on the wing,
> Hang o'er the box and hover round the ring.
> As now your own our beings were of old,
> And once enclosed in woman's beauteous mould;
> Think not, when woman's transient breath is fled,
> That all her vanities at once are dead;
> Succeeding vanities she still regards,
> And though she plays no more, o'erlooks the cards.
> For when the fair in all their pride expire,
> To their first elements their souls retire;
> The sprites of fiery termagants in flame
> Mount up and take a salamander's name:
> Soft yielding nymphs to water glide away
> And sip, with nymphs, their elemental tea;
> The graver prude sinks downward to a gnome
> In search of mischief still on earth to roam;
> The light coquettes in sylphs aloft repair
> And sport and flutter in the fields of air."

And the contrivance by which Belinda is awakened is also perfectly in keeping with all the rest of the machinery:—

"He said: when Shock, who thought she slept too long,
Leaped up and waked his mistress with his tongue;
'Twas then, Belinda, if report say true,
Thy eyes first opened on a *billet-doux*."

Throughout this poem the satiric wit of Pope peeps out in the pleasantest little smiling ways, as where, in describing the toilet-table, he says:—

"Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, *billet-doux*."

Or when, after the fatal lock has been severed,

"Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes,
And screams of horror rend the affrighted skies,
Not louder shrieks to pitying Heaven are cast
When husbands or when lapdogs breathe their last;
Or when rich china-vessels, fallen from high,
In glittering dust and painted fragments lie!'

And so when the conflict begins:—

"Now Jove suspends his golden scales in air;
Weighs the men's wits against the ladies' hair;
The doubtful beam long nods from side to side;
At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside."

But more than the wit and fancy, I think, the perfect keeping of the poem deserves admiration. Except a touch of grossness, here and there, there is the most pleasing harmony in all the conceptions and images. The punishments which he assigns to the sylphs who neglect their duty are charmingly appropriate and ingenious:—

"Whatever spirit, careless of his charge,
His post neglects, or leaves the fair at large,
Shall feel sharp vengeance soon o'ertake his sins;
Be stopped in vials or transfixed with pins,
Or plunged in lakes of bitter washes lie,
Or wedged whole ages in a bodkin's eye;
Gums and pomatums shall his flight restrain,
While clogged he beats his silver wings in vain;
Or alum styptics with contracting power,
Shrink his thin essence like a rivelled flower;
Or as Ixion fixed the wretch shall feel
The giddy motion of the whirling wheel,
In fumes of burning chocolate shall glow,
And tremble at the sea that froths below!"

The speech of Thalestris, too, with its droll climax, is equally good :—

> " Methinks already I your tears survey,
> Already hear the horrid things they say,
> Already see you a degraded toast,
> And all your honour in a whisper lost !
> How shall I then your helpless fame defend ?
> 'Twill then be infamy to seem your friend !
> And shall this prize, the inestimable prize,
> Exposed through crystal to the gazing eyes,
> And heightened by the diamond's circling rays,
> On that rapacious hand for ever blaze ?
> Sooner shall grass in Hyde Park Circus grow,
> And wits take lodging in the sound of Bow ;
> Sooner let earth, air, sea, in chaos fall,
> Men, monkeys, lapdogs, parrots, perish all ! "

So also Belinda's account of the morning omens :—

> " 'Twas this the morning omens seemed to tell ;
> Thrice from my trembling hand the patch-box fell ;
> The tottering china shook without a wind ;
> Nay, Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind."

The idea of the goddess of Spleen, and of her palace where

> " The dreaded East is all the wind that blows,"

was a very happy one. In short, the whole poem more truly deserves the name of a creation than anything Pope ever wrote. The action is confined to a world of his own, the supernatural agency is wholly of his own contrivance, and nothing is allowed to overstep the limitations of the subject. It ranks by itself as one of the purest works of human fancy ; whether that fancy be strictly poetical or not is another matter. If we compare it with the " Midsummer Night's Dream," an uncomfortable doubt is suggested. The perfection of form in the " Rape of the Lock " is to me conclusive evidence that in it the natural genius of Pope found fuller and freer expression than in any other of his poems. The others are aggregates of brilliant passages rather than harmonious wholes.

It is a droll illustration of the inconsistencies of human

nature, a more profound satire than Pope himself ever wrote, that his fame should chiefly rest upon the "Essay on Man." It has been praised and admired by men of the most opposite beliefs, and men of no belief at all. Bishops and free-thinkers have met here on a common ground of sympathetic approval. And, indeed, there is no particular faith in it. It is a droll medley of inconsistent opinions. It proves only two things beyond a question—that Pope was not a great thinker; and that wherever he found a thought, no matter what, he could express it so tersely, so clearly, and with such smoothness of versification, as to give it an everlasting currency. Hobbes's unwieldy Leviathan, left stranded there on the shore of the last age, and nauseous with the stench of its selfishness—from this Pope distilled a fragrant oil with which to fill the brilliant lamps of his philosophy—lamps like those in the tombs of alchemists, that go out the moment the healthy air is let in upon them. The only positive doctrines in the poem are the selfishness of Hobbes set to music, and the Pantheism of Spinoza brought down from mysticism to commonplace. Nothing can be more absurd than many of the dogmas taught in this "Essay on Man." For example, Pope affirms explicitly that instinct is something better than reason:—

> "See him from Nature rising slow to art,
> To copy instinct then was reason's part;
> Thus, then, to man the voice of nature spake;—
> Go, from the creatures thy instructions take;
> Learn from the beasts what food the thickets yield;
> Learn from the birds the physic of the field:
> The arts of building from the bee receive;
> Learn of the mole to plough, the worm to weave;
> Learn of the little nautilus to sail;
> Spread the thin oar, or catch the driving gale."

I say nothing of the quiet way in which the general term "nature" is substituted for God, but how unutterably void of reasonableness is the theory that Nature would have left her highest product, man, destitute of that instinct with which she had endowed her other creatures! As if reason were not the most sublimated form of instinct. The

accuracy on which Pope prided himself, and for which he is commended, was not accuracy of thought so much as of expression. And he cannot always even claim this merit, but only that of correct rhyme, as in one of the passages I have already quoted from the "Rape of the Lock," he talks of *casting* shricks to heaven—a performance of some difficulty, except when *cast* is needed to rhyme with *last.*

But the supposition is that in the "Essay on Man" Pope did not himself know what he was writing. He was only the condenser and epigrammatiser of Bolingbroke—a very fitting St. John for such a gospel. Or, if he *did* know, we can account for the contradictions by supposing that he threw in some of the commonplace moralities to conceal his real drift. Johnson asserts that Bolingbroke in private laughed at Pope's having been made the mouthpiece of opinions which he did not hold. But this is hardly probable when we consider the relations between them. It is giving Pope altogether too little credit for intelligence to suppose that he did not understand the principles of his intimate friend. The caution with which he at first concealed the authorship would argue that he had doubts as to the reception of the poem. When it was attacked on the score of infidelity, he gladly accepted Warburton's championship, and assumed whatever pious interpretation he contrived to thrust upon it. The beginning of the poem is familiar to everybody :—

> "Awake, my St. John, leave all meaner things
> To low ambition and the pride of kings ;
> Let us (since life can little more supply
> Than just to look about us and to die)
> Expatiate free o'er all this scene of man,
> A mighty maze,—but not without a plan ;"

To expatiate *o'er* a mighty maze is rather loose writing ; but the last verse, as it stood in the original editions, was,

> "A mighty maze of walks without a plan ;"

and perhaps this came nearer Pope's real opinion than the verse he substituted for it. Warburton is careful not to

mention *this* variation in his notes. The poem is everywhere as remarkable for confusion of logic as it often is for ease of verse and grace of expression. An instance of both occurs in a passage frequently quoted:—

> "Heaven from all creatures hides the book of fate;
> All but the page prescribed, their present state;
> From brutes what men, from men what spirits know,
> Or who would suffer being here below?
> The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed to-day,
> Had he thy reason, would he skip and play?
> Pleased to the last, he crops the flowery food,
> And licks the hand just raised to shed his blood.
> O, blindness to the future kindly given
> That each may fill the circle meant by heaven!
> Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
> A hero perish or a sparrow fall,
> Atoms or systems into ruin hurled,
> And now a bubble burst, and now a world!"

Now, if "heaven from all creatures hides the book of fate," why should not the lamb "skip and play," if he had the reason of man? Why, because he would then be able to read the book of fate. But if man himself cannot, why, then, could the lamb with the reason of man? For, if the lamb had the reason of man, the book of fate would still be hidden, so far as himself was concerned. If the inferences we can draw from appearances are equivalent to a knowledge of destiny, the knowing enough to take an umbrella in cloudy weather might be called so. There is a manifest confusion between what we know about ourselves and about other people; the whole point of the passage being that we are always mercifully blinded to *our own* future, however much reason we may possess. There is also inaccuracy as well as inelegance in saying,

> "Heaven,
> *Who* sees with equal eye, as God of all,
> A hero perish or a sparrow fall."

To the last verse Warburton, desirous of reconciling his author with Scripture, appends a note referring to Matthew x. 29: "Are not two sparrows sold for one farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your

Father." It would not have been safe to have referred to the thirty-first verse: "Fear ye not, therefore, *ye are of more value* than many sparrows."

To my feeling, one of the most beautiful passages in the whole poem is that familiar one:—

> "Lo, the poor Indian whose untutored mind
> Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind,
> His soul proud science never taught to stray
> Far as the solar walk or milky way:
> Yet simple Nature to his hope has given
> Behind the cloud-top hill a humble heaven;
> Some safer world in depth of woods embraced,
> Some happier island in the watery waste,
> Where slaves once more their native land behold,
> No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold.
> To *be* contents his natural desire,
> He asks no angel's wing, no seraph's fire,
> But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
> His faithful dog shall bear him company."

But this comes in as a corollary to what went just before:—

> "Hope springs eternal in the human breast,
> Man never is but always to be blest;
> The soul, uneasy, and confined from home,
> Rests and expatiates in a life to come."

Then follows immediately the passage about the poor Indian, who, after all, it seems, is contented with merely *being*, and whose soul, therefore, is an exception to the general rule. And what have the "solar walk" (as he calls it) and "milky way," to do with the affair? Does our hope of heaven depend on our knowledge of astronomy? Or does he mean that science and faith are necessarily hostile? And, after being told that it is the "untutored mind" of the savage which "sees God in clouds and hears him in the wind," we are rather surprised that the lesson the poet intends to teach is that

> "All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
> Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.
> That, changed through all, and yet in all the same,
> Great in the earth, as in the ethereal frame:
> Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
> Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees.'

So that we are no better off than the unturtored Indian, after the poet has tutored us. Dr. Warburton makes a rather lame attempt to ward off the charge of Spinozism from this last passage. He would have found it harder to show that the acknowledgment of any divine revelation would not overturn the greater part of its teachings. If Pope intended by his poem all that the bishop takes for granted in his commentary, we must deny him what is usually claimed as his first merit—clearness. If he did *not*, we grant him clearness as a writer at the expense of sincerity as a man. Perhaps a more charitable solution of the difficulty would be, that Pope's precision of thought was no match for the fluency of his verse.

Lord Byron goes so far as to say, in speaking of Pope, that he who executes the best, no matter what his department, will rank the highest. I think there are enough indications in these letters of Byron's, however, that they were written rather more against Wordsworth than for Pope. The rule he lays down would make Voltaire a greater poet, in some respects, than Shakespeare. Byron cites Petrarch as an example; yet if Petrarch had put nothing more into the sonnets than *execution*, there are plenty of Italian sonneteers who would be his match. But, in point of fact, the department chooses the man and not the man the department, and it has a great deal to do with our estimate of him. Is the department of Milton no higher than that of Butler? Byron took especial care not to write in the style he commended. But I think Pope has received quite as much credit in respect even of execution as he deserves. Surely execution is not confined to versification alone. What can be worse than this?

> "At length Erasmus, that great, injured name,
> (The glory of the priesthood and the shame,)
> Stemmed the wild torrent of a barbarous age,
> And drove those holy vandals off the stage."

It would have been hard for Pope to have found a prettier piece of confusion in any of the small authors he laughed at than this image of a great, injured name stemming a torrent

and driving vandals off the stage. And in the following verses the image is helplessly confused :—

> " Kind self-conceit to some her glass applies,
> Which no one looks in with another's eyes,
> But, as the flatterer or dependant paint,
> Beholds himself a patriot, chief, or saint."

The use of the word "applies" is perfectly un-English ; and it seems that people who look in this remarkable glass see their pictures and not their reflections. Often, also, when Pope attempts the sublime, his epithets become curiously unpoetical, as where he says, in the Dunciad,

> " As, one by one, at dread Medea's strain,
> The sickening stars fade off *the ethereal plain.*"

And not seldom he is satisfied with the music of the verse without much regard to fitness of imagery ; in the "Essay on Man," for example :—

> " Passions, like elements, though born to fight,
> Yet, mixed and softened, in his work unite ;
> These 't is enough to temper and employ ;
> But what composes man can man destroy ?
> Suffice that reason keep to Nature's road,
> Subject, compound them, follow her and God.
> Love, Hope, and Joy, fair Pleasure's smiling train,
> Hate, Fear, and Grief, the family of Pain,
> These mixed with Art, and to due bounds confined,
> Make and maintain the balance of the mind."

Here reason is represented as an apothecary compounding pills of "pleasure's smiling train" and the "family of pain." And in the Moral Essays,

> " Know God and Nature only are the same ;
> In man the judgment shoots at flying game,
> A bird of passage, gone as soon as found,
> Now in the moon, perhaps, now under ground."

The "judgment shooting at flying game" is an odd image enough ; but I think a bird of passage, now in the moon and now underground, could be found nowhere—out of Goldsmith's Natural History, perhaps. An epigrammatic expression will also tempt him into saying something without basis in truth, as where he ranks together "Macedonia's

madman and the Swede," and says that neither of them "looked forward farther than his nose," a slang phrase which may apply well enough to Charles XII., but certainly not to the pupil of Aristotle, who showed himself capable of a large political forethought. So, too, the rhyme, if correct, is a sufficient apology for want of propriety in phrase, as where he makes "Socrates *bleed.*"

But it is in his Moral Essays and parts of his Satires that Pope deserves the praise which he himself desired :—

> "Happily to steer
> From grave to gay, from lively to severe,
> Correct with spirit, eloquent with ease,
> Intent to reason, or polite to please."

Here Pope must be allowed to have established a style of his own, in which he is without a rival. One can open upon wit and epigram at any page.

> "Behold, if Fortune or a mistress frowns,
> Some plunge in business, others have their crowns ;
> To ease the soul of one oppressive weight,
> This quits an empire, that embroils a state ;
> The same adust complexion has impelled,
> Charles to the convent, Philip to the field."

Indeed, I think one gets a little tired of the invariable *this* set off by the inevitable *that*, and wishes antithesis would let him have a little quiet now and then. In the first couplet, too, the conditional "frown" would have been more elegant. But taken as detached passages, how admirably the different characters are drawn, so admirably that half the verses have become proverbial. This of Addison will bear reading again :—

> "Peace to all such ; but were there one whose fires
> True genius kindles and fair fame inspires ;
> Blest with each talent and each art to please,
> And born to write, converse, and live with ease ;
> Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,
> Bear like the Turk no brother near the throne,
> View him with scornful yet with jealous eyes,
> And hate for arts that caused himself to rise,
> Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
> And, without sneering, teach the rest to sneer ;

Willing to wound and yet afraid to strike,
Just hint a fault and hesitate dislike,
Alike reserved to blame or to commend,
A timorous foe and a suspicious friend;
Dreading e'en fools, by flatterers besieged,
And *so* obliging that he ne'er obliged;
Like Cato give his little Senate laws,
And sit attentive to his own applause,
While wits and templars every sentence raise,
And wonder with a foolish face of praise;—
Who but must laugh if such a man there be?
Who would not weep if Atticus were he?

With the exception of the somewhat technical image in the second verse of Fame blowing the fire of genius, which too much puts us in mind of the frontispieces of the day, surely nothing better of its kind was ever written. How applicable it was to Addison I shall consider in another place. As an accurate intellectual observer and describer of personal weaknesses, Pope stands by himself in English verse.

In his epistle on the characters of women, no one who has ever known a noble woman, nay, I should almost say no one who ever had a mother or a sister, will find much to please him. The climax of his praise rather degrades than elevates.

"O, blest in temper, whose unclouded ray
Can make to-morrow cheerful as to-day,
She who can love a sister's charms, or hear
Sighs for a daughter with unwounded ear,
She who ne'er answers till a husband cools,
Or, if she rules him, never shows she rules,
Charms by accepting, by submitting sways,
Yet has her humour most when she obeys;
Lets fops or fortune fly which way they will,
Disdains all loss of tickets or codille,
Spleen, vapours, or small-pox, above them all,
And mistress of herself, though china fall."

The last line is very witty and pointed—but consider what an ideal of womanly nobleness he must have had, who praises his heroine for not being jealous of her daughter. Addison, in commending Pope's "Essay on Criticism," says, speaking of us "who live in the latter ages of the

world:" "We have little else to do left us but to represent the *common sense* of mankind, in more strong, more beautiful, or more uncommon lights." I think he has here touched exactly the point of Pope's merit, and, in doing so, tacitly excludes him from the position of poet, in the highest sense. Take two of Jeremy Taylor's prose sentences about the Countess of Carbery, the lady in Milton's "Comus:" "The religion of this excellent lady was of another constitution; it took root downward in humility, and brought forth fruit upward in the substantial graces of a Christian, in charity and justice, in chastity and modesty, in fair friendships and sweetness of society. . . . And though she had the greatest judgment, and the greatest experience of things and persons I ever yet knew in a person of her youth and sex and circumstances, yet, as if she knew nothing of it, she had the meanest opinion of herself, and like a fair taper, when she shined to all the room, yet round about her station she had cast a shadow and a cloud, and she shined to everybody but herself." *This* is poetry, though not in verse. The plays of the elder dramatists are not without examples of weak and vile women, but they are not without noble ones either. Take these verses of Chapman, for example:—

> "Let no man value at a little price
> A virtuous woman's counsel: her winged spirit,
> Is feathered oftentimes with noble words
> And like her beauty, ravishing and pure;
> The weaker body, still the stronger soul.
> O, what a treasure is a virtuous wife,
> Discreet and loving. Not one gift on earth
> Makes a man's life so nighly bound to heaven.
> She gives him double forces to endure
> And to enjoy, being one with him,
> Feeling his joys and griefs with equal sense:
> If he fetch sighs, she draws her breath as short;
> If he lament, she melts herself in tears;
> If he be glad, she triumphs; if he stir,
> She moves his way, in all things his sweet ape,
> Himself divinely varied without change.
> All store without her leaves a man but poor,
> And with her poverty is exceeding store."

Pope in the character I have read was drawing his ideal woman, for he says at the end that she shall be his muse. The sentiments are those of a *bourgeois* and of the back parlour, more than of the poet's and the muse's bower. A man's mind is known by the company it keeps.

Now it is very possible that the women of Pope's time were as bad as they could be; but if God made poets for anything, it was to keep alive the traditions of the pure, the holy, and the beautiful. I grant the influence of the age, but there is a sense in which the poet is of no age, and Beauty, driven from every other home, will never be an outcast and a wanderer, while there is a poet's nature left, will never fail of the tribute at least of a song. It seems to me that Pope had a sense of the neat rather than of the beautiful. His nature delighted more in detecting the blemish than in enjoying the charm.

However great his merit in expression, I think it impossible that a true poet could have written such a satire as the Dunciad, which is even nastier than it is witty. It is filthy even in a filthy age, and Swift himself could not have gone beyond some parts of it. One's mind needs to be sprinkled with some disinfecting fluid after reading it. I do not remember that any other poet ever made poverty a crime. And it is wholly without discrimination. De Foe is set in the pillory for ever; and George Wither, the author of that charming poem, "Fair Virtue," classed among the dunces. And was it not in this age that loose Dick Steele paid his wife the finest compliment ever paid to woman, when he said "that to know her was a liberal education?"

Even in the "Rape of the Lock," the fancy is that of a wit rather than of a poet. It might not be just to compare his Sylphs with the Fairies of Shakespeare; but contrast the kind of fancy shown in the poem with that of Drayton's Nymphidia, for example. I will give one stanza of it, describing the palace of the Fairy:—

> "The walls of spiders' legs were made,
> Well mortised, and finely laid;

(He was the master of his trade
It curiously that builded):
The windows of the eyes of cats,
And, for the roof, instead of slats,
'T is covered with the skins of bats,
With moonshine that are gilded."

In the last line the eye and fancy of a poet are recognised.

Personally we know more about Pope than about any of our poets. He kept no secrets about himself. If he did not let the cat out of the bag, he always contrived to give her tail a wrench so that we might know she was there. In spite of the savageness of his satires, his natural disposition seems to have been an amiable one, and his character as an author was as purely factitious as his style. Dr Johnson appears to have suspected his sincerity; but artifice more than insincerity lay at the basis of his character. I think that there was very little real malice in him, and that his "evil was wrought from want of thought." When Dennis was old and poor, he wrote a prologue for a play to be acted for his benefit. Except Addison, he numbered among his friends the most illustrious men of his time.

The correspondence of Pope is, on the whole, less interesting than that of any other eminent English poet, except that of Southey, and their letters have the same fault of being laboured compositions. Southey's are, on the whole, the more agreeable of the two, for they inspire one (as Pope's certainly do not) with a sincere respect for the character of the writer. Pope's are altogether too full of the proclamation of his own virtues to be pleasant reading. It is plain that they were mostly addressed to the public, perhaps even to posterity. But letters, however carefully drilled to be circumspect, are sure to blab, and those of Pope leave in the reader's mind an unpleasant feeling of circumspection—of an attempt to look as an eminent literary character should rather than as the man really was. They have the unnatural constraint of a man in full dress sitting for his portrait, and endeavouring to look his best. We never catch him, if he can help it, at unawares. Among all Pope's correspondents, Swift shows in the most

dignified, and, one is tempted to say, the most amiable light. It is creditable to the Dean that the letters which Pope addressed to him are by far the most simple and straightforward of any that he wrote. No sham could encounter those terrible eyes in Dublin without wincing. I think, on the whole, that a revision of judgment would substitute "discomforting consciousness of the public" for "insincerity" in judging Pope's character by his letters. He could not shake off the habits of the author, and never, or almost never, in prose, acquired that knack of seeming carelessness that makes Walpole's elaborate compositions such agreeable reading. Pope would seem to have kept a commonplace book of phrases proper to this or that occasion; and he transfers a compliment, a fine moral sentiment, nay, even sometimes a burst of passionate ardour, from one correspondent to another, with the most cold-blooded impartiality. Were it not for this curious economy of his, no one could read his letters to Lady Wortley Montague without a conviction that they were written by a lover. Indeed, I think nothing short of the *spretæ injuria formæ* will account for (though it will not excuse) the savage vindictiveness he felt and showed towards her. It may be suspected also that the bitterness of caste added gall to his resentment. His enemy wore that impenetrable armour of superior rank which rendered her indifference to his shafts the more provoking that it was unaffected. Even for us his satire loses its sting when we reflect that it is not in human nature for a woman to have had two such utterly irreconcilable characters as those of Lady Mary before and after her quarrel with the poet. In any view of Pope's conduct in this affair, there is an ill-savour in his attempting to degrade a woman whom he had once made sacred with his love. Spenser touches the right chord when he says of the Rosalind who had rejected him—

> "Not, then, to her, that scornéd thing so base,
> But to myself the blame, that lookt so high;
> Yet so much grace let her vouchsafe to grant
> To simple swain sith her I may not love,

> Yet that I may her honor paravant
> And praise her worth, though far my wit above,
> Such grace shall be some guerdon of the grief
> And long affliction which I have endured."

In his correspondence with Aaron Hill, Pope, pushed to the wall, appears positively mean. He vainly endeavours to show that his personalities had all been written in the interests of literature and morality, and from no selfish motive. But it is hard to believe that Theobald would have been deemed worthy of his disgustful pre-eminence but for the manifest superiority of his edition of Shakespeare, or that Addison would have been so adroitly disfigured unless through wounded self-love. It is easy to conceive the resentful shame which Pope must have felt when Addison so almost contemptuously disavowed all complicity in his volunteer defence of *Cato* in a brutal assault on Dennis. Pope had done a mean thing to propitiate a man whose critical judgment he dreaded; and the great man, instead of thanking him, had resented his interference as impertinent. In the whole portrait of Atticus one cannot help feeling that Pope's satire is not founded on knowledge, but rather on what his own sensitive suspicion divined of the opinions of one whose expressed preferences in poetry implied a condemnation of the very grounds of the satirist's own popularity. We shall not so easily give up the purest and most dignified figure of that somewhat vulgar generation, who ranks with Sidney and Spenser, as one of the few perfect gentlemen in our literary annals. A man who could command the unswerving loyalty of honest and impulsive Dick Steele could not have been a coward or a backbiter. The only justification alleged by Pope was of the flimsiest kind—namely, that Addison regretted the introduction of the sylphs in the second edition of the "Rape of the Lock," saying that the poem was *merum sal* before. Let anyone ask himself how he likes an author's emendations of any poem to which his ear had adapted itself in its former shape, and he will hardly think it needful to charge Addison with any mean motive

for his conservatism in this matter. One or two of Pope's letters are so good as to make us regret that he did not oftener don the dressing-gown and slippers in his correspondence. One in particular, to Lord Burlington, describing a journey on horseback to Oxford with Lintot the bookseller, is full of a lightsome humour worthy of Cowper, almost worthy of Gray.

Joseph Warton, in summing up at the end of his essay on the genius and writings of Pope, says that the largest part of his works "is of the *didactic*, *moral*, and *satiric;* and, consequently, not of the most *poetic* species of *poetry;* whence it is manifest that *good sense* and *judgment* were his characteristical excellences rather than *fancy* and *invention.*" It is plain that in any strict definition there can be only one kind of poetry, and that what Warton really meant to say was that Pope was not a poet at all. This, I think, is shown by what Johnson says in his "Life of Pope," though he does not name Warton. The dispute on this point went on with occasional lulls for more than a half-century after Warton's death. It was renewed with peculiar acrimony when the Rev. W. L. Bowles diffused and confused Warton's critical opinions in his own peculiarly helpless way in editing a new edition of Pope in 1806. Bowles entirely mistook the functions of an editor, and maladroitly entangled his judgment of the poetry with his estimate of the author's character.* Thirteen years later, Campbell, in his "Specimens," controverted Mr. Bowles's estimate of Pope's character and position, both as man and poet. Mr. Bowles replied in a letter to Campbell on what he called "the invariable principles of poetry." This letter was in turn somewhat sharply criticised by Gilchrist in the Quarterly Review. Mr. Bowles made an

* Bowles's Sonnets, well-nigh forgotten now, did more than his controversial writings for the cause he advocated. Their influence upon the coming generation was great (greater than we can well account for) and beneficial. Coleridge tells us that he made forty copies of them while at Christ's Hospital. Wordsworth's prefaces first made imagination the true test of poetry, in its more modern sense. But they drew little notice till later.

angry and unmannerly retort, among other things charging Gilchrist with the crime of being a tradesman's son, whereupon the affair became what they call on the frontier a free fight, in which Gilchrist, Roscoe, the elder Disraeli, and Byron took part with equal relish, though with various fortune. The last shot, in what had grown into a thirty years' war, between the partisans of what was called the Old School of poetry and those of the New, was fired by Bowles in 1826. Bowles, in losing his temper, lost also what little logic he had, and though, in a vague way, æsthetically right, contrived always to be argumentatively wrong. Anger made worse confusion in a brain never very clear, and he had neither the scholarship nor the critical faculty for a vigorous exposition of his own thesis. Never was wilder hitting than his, and he laid himself open to dreadful punishment, especially from Byron, whose two letters are masterpieces of polemic prose. Bowles most happily exemplified in his own pamphlets what was really the turning-point of the whole controversy (though all the combatants more or less lost sight of it or never saw it)—namely, that without clearness and terseness there could be no good writing, whether in prose or verse; in other words, that, while precision of phrase presupposes lucidity of thought, yet good writing is an art as well as a gift. Byron alone saw clearly that here was the true knot of the question, though, as his object was mainly mischief, he was not careful to loosen it. The sincerity of Byron's admiration of Pope has been, it seems to me, too hastily doubted. What he admired in him was that patience in careful finish which he felt to be wanting in himself and in most of his contemporaries. Pope's assailants went so far as to make a defect of what, rightly considered, was a distinguished merit, though the amount of it was exaggerated. The weak point in the case was that his nicety concerned itself wholly about the phrase, leaving the thought to be as faulty as it would, and that it seldom extended beyond the couplet, often not beyond a single verse. His serious poetry, therefore, at its best, is a succession of loosely strung epigrams, and no poet more

often than he makes the second line of the couplet a mere train-bearer to the first. His more ambitious works may be defined as careless thinking carefully versified. Lessing was one of the first to see this, and accordingly he tells us that "his great, I will not say greatest, merit lay in what we call the mechanic of poetry."* Lessing, with his usual insight, parenthetically qualifies his statement; for where Pope, as in the "Rape of the Lock," found a subject exactly level with his genius, he was able to make what, taken for all in all, is the most perfect poem in the language.

It will hardly be questioned that the man who writes what is still piquant and rememberable, a century and a quarter after his death, was a man of genius. But there are two modes of uttering such things as cleave to the memory of mankind. They may be said or sung. I do not think that Pope's verse anywhere sings, but it should seem that the abiding presence of fancy in his best work forbids his exclusion from the rank of poet. The atmosphere in which he habitually dwelt was an essentially prosaic one, the language habitual to him was that of conversation and society, so that he lacked the help of that fresher dialect which seems like inspiration in the elder poets. His range of associations was of that narrow kind which is always vulgar, whether it be found in the village or the court. Certainly he has not the force and majesty of Dryden in his better moods, but he has a grace, a finesse, an art of being pungent, a sensitiveness to impressions, that would incline us to rank him with Voltaire (whom in many ways he so much resembles), as an author with whom the gift of writing was primary, and that of verse secondary. No other poet that I remember ever wrote prose which is so purely prose as his; and yet, in any impartial criticism, the "Rape of the Lock" sets him even as a poet far above many men more largely endowed with poetic feeling and insight than he.

* Briefe die neueste Litteratur betreffend, 1759, ii. Brief. See also his more elaborate criticism on the "Essay on Man" (Pope ein Metaphysiker), 1755.

A great deal must be allowed to Pope for the age in which he lived, and not a little, I think, for the influence of Swift. In his own province he still stands unapproachably alone. If to be the greatest satirist of individual men, rather than of human nature, if to be the highest expression which the life of the court and the ball-room has ever found in verse, if to have added more phrases to our language than any other but Shakespeare, if to have charmed four generations make a man a great poet,—then he is one. He was the chief founder of an artificial style of writing, which in his hands was living and powerful, because he used it to express artificial modes of thinking and an artificial state of society. Measured by any high standard of imagination, he will be found wanting; tried by any test of wit, he is unrivalled.

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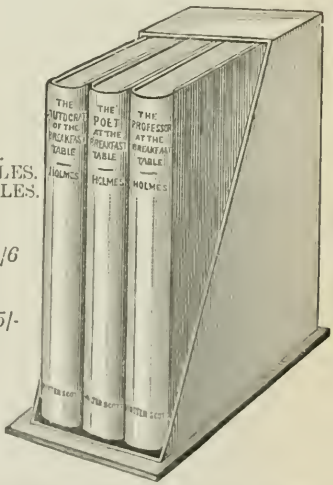


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